THE COACHMAN'S CLUB;

OR,

TALES TOLD OUT OF SCHOOL.

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Tales Told Out of School.

By

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'Mary Jane's Memoirs,' 'How the Poor Live,'
'The Dagonet Ballads,' &c

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I.—WHY IT WAS WHISPERED.

I THINK it was a piece of poetry I wrote about our coach that first gave me a taste for pen and ink.

We used to carry the same passengers pretty often in the season, and old Jim Dolby, who was our driver, and one of the best whips on the road, having taken a fancy to me from the first, and always saying, "Come along, John," when he went in to have a drink when we were changing horses, I got to be well known to most of them, and, what with tips and one thing and the other, I did very well.

I wouldn't have gone guard with anybody, because I was a very good whip myself and had been brought up with horses all my life, but to be guard on the coach that Jim Dolby drove wasn't a thing to be sneezed at. We carried the pick of the coaching patrons and members of Parliament and no end of well-known public men, and there was never a week passed as we hadn't a gentleman

from one of the newspapers with us, so we were always having articles and paragraphs written about the coach and ourselves, and as I was nearly always mentioned as "John Wynterdyke, the cheery, obliging guard," I may say without boasting that in my way I became a public character too.

When I wrote the piece of poetry about Jim Dolby and our coach, bringing in bits about the road we took, the houses we stopped at, and the gentleman whips as used sometimes to take the ribbons, I did it to pass an hour away, as the saying is, being fond of writing poetry from a boy, and rhyming coming natural to me. But one evening after we'd finished our journey I was having a glass along with Jim, and I pulled the bit of paper out of my pocket; quite by accident it came into my head to read him what I'd written.

Jim he listened very attentive till I'd done, and then he said, "John, if you wrote me that 'ere out o' your own head, my boy, blow me if you didn't ought to be in Parliament—not as that's sayin' much, seein' the sort as gets there nowadays."

Then he said would I give it him and let him show it to one of the newspaper gentlemen? I said of course he might if he liked, and gave it him, and a few days afterwards it was in one of the sporting papers, and it got about, and one of the gentlemen who ran the coach had a lot of copies nicely printed and framed, and put my name at the

bottom, and the landlords of the hotels we stopped at stuck it up in their halls or their bars.

And they're hanging there now, I'm told, though it's five years or more since I travelled that road, and poor old Jim has done his last earthly stage and is lying under the green grass in a quiet churchyard with a handsome monument a-recording his many virtues above his honoured remains.

Poor old Jim! As the landlord of the Old Red Lion, who is a bit of a poet himself, said to me as we come away from the funeral together, "Take him for all in all, it'll be many a long day before we looks upon the likes of him again."

To which, with tears in my eyes (for all through the burial service I could see him that was dead and gone tooling his team merrily along with a smile on his face and a big cigar in his mouth), I answered with a choke in my throat, "And so say all of us."

But coming back to my bit o' poetry, it did me a lot of good one way and another, and I was taken more notice of than I'd ever been before, and if I'd been a fool my head might have been turned. But I had sense enough to know that there's lots of people—even costermongers—who can make rhymes on things they know about, so I didn't go and imagine myself Lord Tennyson, though some of the newspaper gents in their chaffing way used to call me "The Laureate of the Road."

But it gave me the idea that I'd like to write

something else, and it made me keep my eyes open, and of an evening when I'd nothing particular to do I'd sit at home with the missus and the children and write down things I remembered about the different characters I'd met on the road and other odd passengers and queer adventures, and I made up my mind as some day I'd try and get them into a newspaper.

One or two short things did get put into the papers that the coaching gents read, but I found it took up a lot of time writing them, and as it was pretty late before I got home and I was always off again early in the morning, the missus began to grumble and the children didn't like being made to go to bed early or sit as still as mice so as not to interrupt me, and I made up my mind to give up authorship and romp with the young 'uns and take the missus out after they'd gone to bed as I'd used to do.

And when I'd settled down again into a respectable married man and the father of a family my missus, bless her loving little heart, said it was a merciful Providence as had made me see the error of my ways, for to sit opposite a man who was scratching with a pen all the evening and spilling the ink all over the table, and never answering a question unless shouted at or nudged, was getting on her nerves, and many a time she'd wished the pen and ink at Jericho.

I don't suppose I should ever have took up my

pen again but for a great change in my circumstances as took place soon after. There was a gentleman who used to ride pretty often on our coach, and he'd taken a fancy to me from the first, and always been most liberal in the matter of tips. He'd got to know as I knew a lot about horses and could handle a team myself, and one day he staggered me by saying, "Wynterdyke, are you open to take a good berth supposin' as one was offered to you?"

"Well, sir," I said, "it depends on what sort of a berth it was." With that he told me that he'd got a big establishment and a lot of horses, both in London and at his country place, and that his head coachman was leaving, and if I liked to take the berth I could have it.

I asked him for a couple of days to consider, and I went and talked it over with some of my pals, and I found as it was a first-class position and that I should have a lot of men under me to do the work and only have to drive her ladyship—the gentleman was a Bart. and a member of Parliament, and a member of the Coaching Club—and so the next day I went to him and said that I'd accept his offer.

And it was through being coachman to Sir Walter Randall, M.P., and her ladyship always wanting me to drive her late at night—she being nervous and having once been upset through the second coachman getting drunk waiting about for

her at a reception in Grosvenor-square—as I was introduced to the Coachman's Club, which is held in a public-house not a hundred miles from Mayfair.

And it was through going to the Coachman's Club one or two evenings a week as I heard the many strange tales—some of them almost romances I may say—which was told by the servants of the rich people and the aristocracy who used the house and went there nightly to drink a social glass and smoke a pipe, and talk over their own business and that of their masters and missuses.

I'm not a man for spending my evenings away from home, but after I'd been once or twice to the club and listened to the things the men talked about, I got the idea as I would write it all down and be an author again.

I've heard that when once a tiger has tasted blood he can't keep away from it, and I think that must be very like the author who's once tasted ink. You may keep it under for a time, but it's bound to burst out again sooner or later, because it's in your system, as poor old Jim used to say when everybody recommended him something different for his rheumatics.

Of course, not being a born author, but only what I think is called an amateur, and never having the advantages of education and practice that the celebrated and popular writers of the day have, I haven't always been able to write about anything as interestingly as they'd have done.

But my memory, which is good, helps me to put down afterwards the stories of the coachmen and grooms and valets and footmen (which all of them had to be introduced into the club by a member, because there was no election or entrance fee or anything of that sort, it only being called a club beeause there was one room, a sort of parlour, always kept for us of an evening, and none of the other customers allowed in it unless we invited them) pretty much as I heard them.

But, of course, I haven't used real names, not wishing to get anybody into trouble—or, for the matter of that, to get into trouble myself.

And I'm not going to say as *all* as was said in the club was quite true, or perhaps mighn't have had a different complexion put on it if the masters and missuses could have told the story *their* way.

But most of it is as near true as stories about other people's business generally are, and from what I've heard outside the club in many cases—and sometimes read afterwards in the newspapers, when the story has got into one of the Law Courts—I may say as most of the stories was real facts and had happened, or was happening, at the time in the families in which my fellow-clubmen were in service.

* * * *

The big armchair as stood at the top of the room and at the head of the table at which a select number of the members sat of an evening and smoked their pipes and refreshed themselves was

always held sacred to the honoured chairman when he was in town.

The chairman was Mr. Hutchins. What Mr. Hutchins's Christian name was I never knew. He wasn't the sort of person as could be called anything *but* Mr. Hutchins. To his wife he might have been William — perhaps Bill, perhaps Robert, perhaps Bob; but to us he was always Mr. Hutchins—a person to be treated with awe and respect, not only on account of his age and experience, but because he was a "wigsman," one of them fine old full-size coachmen as runs in big families, and ain't hardly ever found outside the aristocracy.

I did know one in a job yard once, but he'd been brought there through making a book on the Derby and losing so heavy he had to hide, and there isn't a safer place on earth for West End noblemen's coachmen to hide in than a Holloway Road Bait and Livery.

But coming back to Mr. Hutchins, he was head coachman to the Most Noble the Marquis of——, and had been in the service of his lordship's family all his life, likewise his father and his grandfather before him. Mr. Hutchins was our greatest authority upon the aristocracy of Great Britain. He had all their titles and their histories at his fingers' ends, and I heard him say once, after having spoken about a book called, I think, "The Romance of the Peerage," that if the gentleman as wrote it

had come to him he could have told him a lot as he evidently didn't know.

When I was first introduced to the club the members were all agog about a mysterious paragraph which had appeared in one of the evening papers. It began, "It is whispered." I've noticed as when anything is particularly unpleasant about anybody well known or in a high position, it always *is* "whispered" in the papers, though everywhere else it's talked about at the top of people's voices. But as I was saying, it was "whispered" that a marriage arranged between two noble families, and which was shortly to have been celebrated, had been suddenly broken off, and wouldn't take place.

"Ah," said Mr. Hutchins, when the members began to talk about the paragraph, and to wonder who could be meant, "under the circumstances, I don't see how it could."

"Then you know all about it, Mr. Hutchins?" said a dark, shaven-faced young fellow who was valet to a young nobleman who had just succeeded to the family estates, and was making London sit up, as the saying is.

"Not all, perhaps, Mr. Jessop, because 'all' ain't known to nobody outside the family, except perhaps the doctor and the lawyer; but I know as much as anybody else."

"Who is it, Mr. Hutchins?"

"Well, I should have thought some of you as 'as

stayed at Elmore Castle with your governors would ha' guessed!"

The mention of Elmore Castle was a clue, and several of the members exclaimed all at once, "Lord Archibald, is it? Ah!"

"Yes," said Mr. Hutchins, taking the old-fashioned long clay which he always smoked of an evening from his mouth, and holding it in his hand and wagging it every now and then as he spoke, "it's Lord Archibald.

"When I heard from his lordship's valet as he was going to marry Lady Grace Newlyn, I said to my missus, 'God help her! if it ain't stopped!' and I've said 'God help her!' to myself whenever I've thought about it. She's a sweet creature, is Lady Grace, and many's the time at our country place as I've saddled her pony and seen to it myself when she was a young slip of a gal, but beautiful then as she is now, and what I call a real English aristocrat.

"I'd ha' liked to see her marry into our family, for you don't come across her sort often in these days, with furrin' ways coming in, and our ladies some of 'em getting more French than English so to speak. It was never no love match that, I'll swear, because she wasn't the sort of gal to take to a man like Lord Archibald. It was her mother's work, I'll be bound. And more shame for her.

"The first time I ever heard anything against

him was from Mr. Burbidge, his groom, as came to see me in town.

"He asked my advice about leaving, saying as Lord Archibald was that dreadful in the fits of temper as came over him sometimes that he was afeard to be out with him. He'd take it into his head all of a sudden in some quiet part of the country to set to and thrash his horse so cruel that Mr. Burbidge felt he'd like to snatch the whip from him and thrash him with it.

"And his lordship's valet had told Mr. Burbidge queer things too. But the queerest was his going into his lordship's room one morning to put his things out and finding him dancing about mother-naked a-flourishing a razor.

"He told his valet it was all right, he was only going to shave; but the young man didn't get over it for a week, and soon after he left.

"Then he went away, Lord Archibald did—travelling, so 'twas said—and was away in foreign parts for a time, and soon after he came back at the beginning of the season it was announced as he was engaged to be married to Lady Grace.

"I heard the rights of it from my missus, as is friendly with Lady Grace's maid. You can take it from me as that sweet young lady was worritted into allowing herself to be engaged to Lord Archibald Elmore by her mother, which, her ladyship not being present, nor nobody in her service, I

don't make no apologies for calling a thundrin' bad lot.

"It ain't my place to talk scandal about the aristocracy, which there's quite enough of it in the newspapers nowadays, and a good deal more than in my young days, when papers wasn't published every quarter of an hour all day long at a halfpenny, and gentlemen like as took a interest in hoss racin' had to go to a public-house where they took the *Sun* and had a card stuck up in the window to say so, to see what had won and if they'd got money to draw the next morning.

"But it ain't scandal to say what I know about her ladyship as is unfortunately Lady Grace's mother, because in her day everybody as is anybody and had to do with the aristocracy knew it. She was nussery governess in the Newlyn family up to one Friday night, and the Saturday morning she was standing as bold as brass in front of a church altar in her everyday bonnet and mantle, and the heir of the house, as was up from Oxford for his holidays, and not a day over twenty, was vowing as he'd love, honour, and obey her, and leave all other and cleave unto her till death did them part.

"And back from the church she drove in a hansom, and went to her duties with the young misses as though nothing had happened, having promised to keep it quiet till the young feller could pluck up courage to tell his father.

"But it came out sooner than was expected through her ladyship—who was, of course, really her mother-in-law, though she didn't know it—finding fault with her one day about something and speaking sharp to her, and with that she up and says, 'If you speak to me like that again, I shall complain to my husband.'

"And her ladyship says, 'Your husband—you impudent creature!—how dare you have a husband, and be addressed by my innocent children as "Miss"? Go out of my house directly!'

"And with that the whole truth came out, for her temper got the better of her, and she sent her ladyship off into hysterics on the spot by saying that she was the lawful wife of her eldest son, the future peer, and when the young fellow came home from a cricket match as he was playing in, being a fine batsman, he found the fat in the fire, and his wife waiting for him in a hansom at the door.

"And directly she sees him she calls out loud for anybody as was passing to hear, 'Robert, your mother has insulted me—you must provide me with a home befitting my rank in life at once, and acknowledge me as your wife before the whole world.'

"And that's how Lady Grace came to have her for a mother.

"But the young fellow he got on with her better than might have been expected, for she was a handsome young woman and clever, and held her own in the best society, and when her husband became

Lord Newlyn, and she was mistress of everything, people had almost forgotten how she ran away with him from her father's home when she was nussery governess to his little sisters.

"There was only one child of the marriage, and that was Lady Grace, and a lovelier young lady and more charming in every way you couldn't find at one of her blessed Majesty's Drawing Rooms. Her father, the Earl, worshipped the ground as she trod on, and she was his constant companion, but somehow or other she was always afraid of her mother.

"Leastways, that's what her maid told my wife, and she's been with her from the time she made her début till now, when she must be four-and-twenty.

"And it was fear of her mother—I'm as sure as I am that I'm sitting in this chair a-smoking this 'ere pipe—that made her accept Lord Archibald, as she met in town first and afterwards at Elmore Castle, where she and the Countess joined the house party, Lord Archibald's father and the late Earl Newlyn having been friends all their lives.

"If the Earl had lived it wouldn't have been allowed; but he died, and died as we all know, gentlemen, in reduced circumstances, as the saying is, through a Chancery suit and other things, as frequently happens to the very best of families.

"From one point o' view it was a good match. Lord Archibald, when his father dies, will be one

of the richest noblemen in the kingdom, and on their wedding day I've heard as he was to settle a big lump o' money on his wife. Lord Archibald's father and the Countess, I've been given to understand, settled that between 'em, for having no other son, the old gentleman was particular anxious for his heir to get married, as he wasn't what could be called—in a business way of speaking—a article as was likely to go off without a lot of pushing.

"They was to have been married, so I read in the *Morning Post*, next month, and now here's the evening papers a-whispering that 'the marriage will not take place,' for you can take it from me that the noble families as is meant are the Elmores and the Newlyns."

Mr. Hutchins's pipe had gone out; he re-filled it, called for another four of brandy, and looked up at the ceiling.

I found out afterwards as it was a habit of his to do that when he got to the most interesting parts of any of his Romances of the Peerage. He was only waiting to be asked to go on. It was the dark young valet as comes to the rescue, as the saying is.

"Of course, Mr. Hutchins, you know *why* it's broke off?" he said.

Mr. Hutchins he lowered his eyes from the ceiling, and looked round at the company as though he was a-studying all the faces present to see if he could trust everybody.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "it's no good saying as I don't know, because I do. One hears some things as is better left unsaid, and there's nobody ain't any the wiser. In ordinary circles I should say no more, having gone perhaps far enough; but here, gentlemen, where we are all moving, so to speak, in the same sphere, I know as nothing won't go beyond these walls."

All the gentlemen present assured Mr. Hutchins that anything he might say would be considered sacred, and after sipping his brandy-and-water and taking half a dozen whiffs at his pipe, amid silence as you might have heard a pin drop in, he gave us the key to the mystery.

"The marriage is broke off, gentlemen," he said, "because Lord Archibald is at the present moment locked away in a wing of Elmore Castle, guarded night and day by two keepers, having, in a fit of homercidal mania, come behind his father, who was walking in the grounds, seized him by the throat, throttled him, and pushed his body into the lake.

"Two of the labourers on the estate as was mercifully passing saw it all and got help and saved his lordship from drowning, but he's in what the faculty calls a percarious condition, but in plain English is a-hoverin' between life and death.

"There's nothing in the papers, and there ain't likely to be, unless the Earl dies, and there's an inquest, or something unpleasant of that sort. But

as a homercidal maniac who has to be watched night and day by two keepers can't exactly be trusted along with a young woman at the altar, Lady Grace's mother has had to give up the little family arrangement, and that's why this marrage—which is whispered about in the evening papers as now lies before us, gentlemen—will not take place.

"If Lord Archibald had only waited another month before going raving mad his homercidal mania would most likely have come upon him in the first days of his 'oneymoon, and then Lady Grace's mother might have had to confess as she knew as she was marrying her innercent daughter to a man whose mother died in a strait-wesket in a private lunatic asylum.

* * * * *

"And now, gents, I'm sorry to disturb the harmony of the evening, but our worthy host is a-looking anxious over the top o' the curtains outside the glass door. It only wants two minutes to 'Time,' so, gentlemen, one and all, Good night."

II.—FATHER AND SON.

It was a pouring wet evening, and the members keeping on coming in, most of them with shiny mackintoshes and dripping umbrellas, and its being what is familiarly called "a beast of a night," the club was a bit quiet.

Mr. Hutchins had dropped in, and was sitting in his big chair at the head of the table, but he'd got a bad cold on him and was drinking hot rum and water and coughing and sneezing and talking about the influenza, which was about dreadfully at the time, several of our people being down with it and three or four of us having our own missuses and young 'uns bad with it. A dreadful thing for going right through a mews is the influenza, though, as far as that goes, so are most things as are catching.

I often wonder, knowing what London mewses are—even some of the most aristocratic, where a cabman's lot or van would be looked upon as something very like a chimney sweep sitting down in a duchess's drawin'-room—what the public would say if they knew the awful places as some of the best families expect their coachmen to bring up a lot of young and delicate children in.

I've said to the missus often, when I've been

reading in the papers of an evening about the dwellings of the working classes, and the row there is in Parliament about 'em, and the fuss as they make about people in the slums and alleys not having plenty of fresh air and sunshine and a wholesome atmosphere to breathe, what a takedown it would be for some of the peers and philanthropists and M.P.'s who are always running down the owners of tenement houses, if the places as they give their coachmen and their coachmen's families to live in could be shown up by one of those evening papers that go in for "horrible revelations," and pile up the agony hot and strong and plenty of it.

I'm all right—don't think I'm complaining myself—because Sir Walter Randall, Bart., M.P., who is my governor, has stables that he's proud of, not only for his horses but all his people, and our living rooms are good enough for anybody. But some of the dark stuffy holes as a man and his wife and three or four children are stowed away in over the horses are a disgrace to civilisation, as the saying is, and often right in the middle of as aristocratic a neighbourhood as any in London—damp, dark, foul-smelling dens, with the water dripping down the walls and no ventilation.

They're the sort of places many a fresh young country girl comes to, to be a wife and mother, and grows faded and old and hollow-eyed years before her time. And the children grow up white-faced

and weak, and —— But, there, if I begin telling what I know of the domestic side of life in an aristocratic mews I shall have a lot o' reporters wanting to interview me for the evening papers and bringing their special artist to sketch our Dustbin, and I don't want to be mixed up with anything of that sort, being in private service and well known, and not wanting to be put down as an agitator or a Socialist or anything of that sort.

You can imagine what life upstairs in a London mews is like for yourself if you see some of them, and when you are imagining it, and you've pictured to yourself an ailing wife, worn out with nursing her delicate children, trying to get a night's rest in a close room filled with the hot, foul air of the stables below, don't forget the horse that bangs his heels against the wooden partition of his stall the whole night long, as many of 'em do, which I know to my cost.

Some day, if I think of it, I'll tell you the story of the horse that kicked all night and the child that crept downstairs to quiet it because its mother was ill and the doctor had said that if she did not sleep she would die. It's a true story, and a story as one of those American gentlemen who write poetry in shilling books would make a lot of. But this isn't the place for it, and I should never have said anything about it or the mewses either if it hadn't been for Mr. Hutchins and the influenza putting it into my head.

Whether it was the wet umbrellas and dripping mackintoshes or Mr. Hutchins being low-spirited —which is one of the symptoms—I don't know, but the club was about as cheerful that night as a coroner's jury. As Mr. Worboys, the Countess of Coggeshall's coachman, said to me, "It might have been a meetin' o' malefactors in the condemned cell drawing lots which was to be hanged first in the morning!" And then he said, "Let's go home!" and we'd just got up when in came Mr. Lambert, a very nice young fellow that we'd all taken a great fancy to.

A very superior young man indeed was Mr. Lambert, not more than six-and-twenty, and that smart and neat and good-looking it must have been a pleasure to any master—or missus either, for the matter of that—to sit behind him. It got about among our members that Frank Lambert was the son of a poor country clergyman who had taken to drink and had been turned out of the Church—or whatever the process is—and had died and left a widow and children in dreadful circumstances, everything having to be sold off after his death, and the boy, who was only about ten at the time, going out into the world almost as an errand boy.

And afterwards he got among horses, and that suited him better, and now he was coachman to a gentleman who had come back from South Africa a year or two ago with lots of money made in diamonds, and taken a house in Russell Square,

and kept six horses, and gave great dinner parties to City people. I suppose he was a Jew, his name being Myers, but he was married to a very handsome lady, who went to church. He was fond of driving himself, having a pair of splendid horses for which Mr. Lambert told me he gave five hundred guineas, and a heavy mail phaeton all red wheels and steel chains, of the "fire engine" order, and fancying himself no end as he drove in the park in the afternoon with his handsome wife beautifully dressed beside him, and Mr. Lambert behind. He wouldn't have the groom because he wouldn't trust anybody but Mr. Lambert to drive those horses even from Russell Square to the stables.

When Mr. Lambert came in me and Mr. Worboys sat down again because we always liked to have a chat with him. It was a pleasure to listen to him because he spoke so well and had a voice that was very soft and what Mr. Warboys once said was "a gentlemanly voice." He meant that he talked more like the quality talk, and not in our happy-go-lucky style, which I suppose was because he was a clergyman's son and had been brought up among well-speaking people until the trouble came on the family.

We noticed he wasn't quite so cheerful as usual, and he lit his cigar and called for a whisky without taking much notice of anybody, which we put down at first to the weather, but presently, when he began to talk to us quietly, we found that it wasn't

that, but something had happened that had upset him.

"I don't care to talk about my governor's private affairs," he said, "but as there's going to be an inquest, and it's bound to come out, I don't see that it matters much."

"An inquest," I said. "Dear me, have you had an accident, then—has the Governor driven over somebody?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that's a dreadful thing; always gives you a turn!" said Mr. Hutchins, leaving off sneezing with an effort. "It's never happened to me, thank God, but I've known men as never got over it. Was it an old woman? — they're generally the ones as slip off the kerb right under the 'osses' legs."

"No," said Mr. Lambert, "it wasn't an old woman; it was a little boy."

"A child! ah, that's shocking. How did it happen?"

"The Governor was coming across Oxford Street to turn into the Park. There was a bit of a block and he whipped up sharp to get out of the way of a 'bus which was coming up behind a covered van. Just as he cleared to get in at the Park gates by the Marble Arch a little boy stepped straight off the pavement, and before the Governor could pull up he was under the horses' feet. The Governor pulled 'em up on their haunches and I jumped

down quick, but the poor little chap's head touched the mare's heels and she lashed out."

"And killed him?"

"No, it didn't kill him, but he was frightfully injured and taken off to the hospital at once. Of course the Governor was terribly upset, and Mrs. Myers being with him he turned back and went home. Directly we got there my mistress told me to go to the hospital at once and see how the boy was. When I got there they told me there was no hope, that the injuries were fatal, and they didn't expect he'd live through the night. He was a poor boy—by which I mean he wasn't a young gentleman—but he was decently dressed and evidently well cared for. The nurse told me there had been another boy with him that we hadn't noticed in the confusion, and this boy had been to the hospital to see how he was, and had gone to fetch the poor child's mother, who, it seems, lived next door to the lad who had been walking with the poor little fellow when the accident happened.

"I went back to Russell Square with the news, and the mistress was terribly upset, and declared that she would go to the hospital later on. I was to go back, and if the mother came ask her to wait, as my mistress wanted to see her, as she was determined everything should be done to comfort her.

"Mr. Myers tried to dissuade his wife, saying it would be too much for her, and very likely the poor woman in her grief might say things that would pain

her, but she declared that as soon as she felt a little better (the accident had made her come over very queer) she'd go.

"'I shan't let you go alone,' said Mr. Myers; 'I'll come with you.'

"I just run into the stables to tell the second man to get the brougham ready and to be at the door in an hour, and then I went back to the hospital. The poor little chap was conscious, but he was going fast—I didn't want the doctor to tell me that.

"The poor mother, a woman of about five-and-thirty, was kneeling by his bedside sobbing, and the poor little lad was looking up at her and trying to reach up his arms and put them round her neck, but he was too weak.

"I couldn't give my message—I felt that if I tried to speak I should burst out crying like a baby myself, and I felt that every thought the poor mother had must be for her dying boy, and I couldn't for the life of me find the words to say that she was to be sure and wait until my mistress came.

"I went up to the other end of the ward and talked to one of the Sisters, and asked her what I had better do, and would she give the message for me if the boy died and his mother wanted to go away, and the Sister said she would be sure and do it if there was any necessity, but the boy would probably live for a little while yet, and his mother wouldn't be likely to leave.

"I was just going—glad to be out of the ward and all that sorrow and suffering—when in came my master and mistress. When my mistress saw the poor woman kneeling by her boy's bedside and heard her choking sobs, it was too much for her, and she sat down on a chair, but my master, wishing to see the doctor and ask him if nothing could be done, stepped quickly behind the screen. As he did so the woman must have looked up, for suddenly a cry rang through the ward, and we heard a woman shriek out, 'John!' Then I saw my master, looking as white as a sheet, stagger out from behind the screen and go to his wife and say to her in a hoarse voice, 'Come! come away!' And she, I suppose, thinking that the end had come, gave a great sob, and took his arm and went out with him.

"There was three or four of the nurses round the dying boy's bed in a moment, for the woman lay in a dead swoon on the floor. Everybody said, 'Poor thing! poor thing!' and the patients were all sitting up in their beds—those who could—and trembling, for they were all terribly upset by that wild cry, and I don't wonder at it.

"I never want to see anything like that in my life again. I couldn't move to go away, for a kind of leaden weight seemed to be in my limbs, and I stood still where I was and saw it all.

"They got the poor thing up from the floor and put her in a chair and brought her round, and while

they were doing that I heard a nurse's voice calling from behind the screen, and the doctor went quickly towards it. The boy had struggled up in the bed and was reaching out his arms towards his mother and trying to call her. Where I was the screen did not hide the bed. I shall never forget the look of horror on the child's face—I think he thought his mother was dead. But, thank God, it didn't last long. It was the last effort. There was a gurgle in his throat and he fell back into the nurse's arms."

"Dead!" said Mr. Hutchins in a choky voice.

"Dead!" said Mr. Lambert, and for a minute nobody spoke.

I was the first to find a voice, and being interested—as we all were—I wanted to know what happened afterwards, because I was sure there was something Mr. Lambert hadn't told us.

"But why did the poor woman faint dead away at the sight of your master, and call him 'John'—and why did he go away like that?" I asked.

"Well," said Mr. Lambert, "I have my own idea, but I don't care to talk about it yet. It will come out, I expect, at the inquest, but it may be something that the master would give a good deal not to have known, and then perhaps he'll be able, being a wealthy man, to hush it up. We shall see. I've told you all I really know, and if you don't mind I'd rather talk about something else, for I want to forget the whole business for a bit if I can. It's

made me so unsettled I couldn't stop at home, and that's why I came round here to-night."

* * * * *

Sir Walter, my master, was going into Yorkshire next day, and I had to box four horses and be off with them by an early train in the morning, so that with the business of going away and one thing and another I forgot all about Mr. Lambert's story, and when we got to Yorkshire we were in a queer, out-of-the-way place, where there were no local papers, and being busy and a lot to see to, I missed the papers that had the inquest in, and the whole thing went out of my mind.

We stayed in Yorkshire for three weeks, and Sir Walter not being very well, and overworked with his Parliamentary duties and all-night sittings, and things of that sort, he went for long country drives with her ladyship nearly every day. It was very nice and very healthy, but I don't think I was ever out of the world so much in all my life. We were in a sort of place which, if there had been a revolution, and England had been proclaimed a republic, nobody would have known anything about it till a month afterwards. I suppose my master had the London papers and got his news regularly, and my missus sent me a paper now and then, but as to meeting anybody to talk to about anything but horses and the crops and the weather, you never did.

And that's why, when I got home and had had a quiet evening with the missus and the children—

I don't believe any man appreciates the blessings of married life and a family until he's been away for a month and had to shift for himself, and felt the loneliness of it—I said to the missus, "My dear, I feel as if I've been out of the world for a year. I shall have to go to the club to-morrow evening, if it's only for an hour, and rub some of the rust off, for I'm blest if I know if Queen Victoria's still on the throne, or what particular tribe of niggers my beloved country is at war with at the present moment. What's the news since I've been away?"

All she could tell me was that there was another baby expected in the Royal Family, which didn't particularly interest me, though it seems to have a wonderful fascination for womenfolk, and that Mrs. Jones' little boy at No. 7 in our mews had had his ears boxed at the Board school, and it had made him break out into a rash, and she hoped it wasn't anything catching.

I laughed, and said I was afraid even the important information she had given me still left me slightly in the dark as to what was the principal topic of conversation in Society, and the next evening, after I'd seen the horses done up for the night and everything ship-shape, I left the missus putting the children to bed, and strolled as far as the club.

There were only a few of our fellows there, and one or two strangers introduced that I didn't know, and Mr. Hutchins's chair being empty, I asked after him, and was sorry to hear that he hadn't been

since the last time I was there, having been taken bad the next day with the influenza and brought so weak and low with it that he'd gone away to breathe his native air, as the saying is, he having been born at the Marquis's seat in Kent, having escaped being a Cockney by one week, the family having only just left town after the London season, and his mother going with them, being the wife of Mr. Hutchins, senior, who, of course, wasn't senior till afterwards, our Mr. Hutchins not being born, but his lordship's second man.

But I had a hearty welcome from the rest, and Mr. Worboys came across and sat down by me and said, "You're just the chap I've been waiting to see. Do you know of a good berth that's going that would suit Frank Lambert?"

That brought the story of the boy who had been run over and "the Hospital Scene"—as they say when they talk about plays at the theatre—back to my mind at once, and I gave quite a start.

"A berth to suit Lambert," I said. "Why, what's he left Mr. Myers for?"

"Haven't you heard?" said Mr. Worboys.

"I've heard nothing," I said. "I've been buried alive for three weeks in an outlandish Yorkshire village where some of the people don't know that Lord Palmerston isn't Prime Minister still!" And then I told him that, something having brought up the Crystal Palace while I was talking to an old lady who kept the village inn, she said, "Ah,

yes—a wonderful place! Me and my husband were there when we first married. It's in Hyde Park."

"I ain't likely to have heard the latest about Mr. Myers and Frank Lambert," I said, "in a place where they haven't got further than Lord Palmerston in politics, and where the Crystal Palace is still in Hyde Park."

"Ah," said Mr. Worboys, "then I'll tell you all about it. You know that night he wouldn't say anything except that the poor little chap they'd run over was dead?"

"And the poor mother called Mr. Myers 'John,' and fainted, and he dragged his wife out of the ward and went off home," I said.

"Yes," says he. "Well, the next day Lambert was sent for to the house, and his governor said he was going to send the horses in to Tattersall's and sell up everything, as he'd been ordered to go abroad for a year for his wife's health. He gave Lambert a month's salary and a written character, and the next day the horses were fetched away, a coach-builder came and took the carriages, and the house was shut up with a bill in the window, 'To be let, furnished, with immediate possession,' and Mr. and Mrs. Myers went off by an evening train, nobody knows where.

"What he told her or how much I suppose we shall never get at, because Mr. Lambert was never one to talk to the female servants, I've heard.

But these things get about somehow, and though it didn't come out at the inquest, where Mr. Lambert was the witness, it being explained by the lawyer that Mr. Myers and his wife had been summoned abroad to the deathbed of a relative—which, of course, was a lie—I got hold of the truth from a housemaid, who is the young woman's cousin who's engaged to my wife's brother, who's a messenger in the office of Mr. Myers's lawyer.

"It seems as his name ain't Myers at all—that's the name he took out in South Africa when he'd begun to make money. Before he went there he was an assistant at a wholesale furrier's in the City, and got to know one of the young women that worked at the sealskin jackets, and they got engaged and he married her, his name then being John Marks.

"After he'd been married about two years he took to betting, and got into a mess, and had the sack, and creditors after him dunning him for money; and one day he said 'Good morning' to his wife and left her with a little boy a few months old and ten pounds which he'd got somehow, and he never came back again, but sent her a note to say that he was no good to anybody any more, and she was to think of him as one dead, and he hoped she'd get on all right, and some day find some good honest man, and all that sort of rot blackguards like that generally talk to smooth their consciences

and stop being inquired after too much. He bolted to South Africa and never wrote to his wife again.

"That's seven years ago, and I suppose he thought after seven years it was pretty safe for Mr. Myers, a rich man, to come back, and he brought the lady he'd married—the daughter of a rich gentleman over there, who'd been his partner in some mining business—back with him, and settled down to be a City swell in Russell Square.

"He never thought the poor work girl, Mrs. Marks, would come across Mr. Myers, of Russell Square, but Providence does wonderful things in queer ways, and Providence brought *that* off and upset all his pretty schemes."

"Then the boy was——!" I gasped, hardly feeling sure I'd quite followed Mr. Worboys.

"His own son—the child he had abandoned on its mother's knee. When he came and stood by that boy's dying bed at the hospital the poor mother looked up and recognised John Marks, her long-lost husband; and you can't wonder, as seeing him there for the first time after all those years and her child lying dead between them, that she fainted dead away."

"No, I said, catching my breath, "I don't wonder. What an awful tragedy! And poor Mrs. Myers?"

"Ain't his wife at all, really, poor lady! But let's hope as she'll never know it. He found some

lie, I'll be bound, to explain his terror and his dragging her away from the hospital."

* * * * * *

When I got home that night I told the story to my wife, and she said that it made her go cold all over to think about it. The father and mother meeting at the bedside of the boy the father had killed—the two wives under the same roof—the sudden recognition of husband by the poor deserted woman, her heart breaking as she watched his son and hers, all she had in the world, dying that dreadful death—and then——

There was a party at one of the big houses, and the back windows were open, and there was dancing and music, and the musicians were playing a set of quadrilles with all the popular airs in them, and, for once in a way, "Tommy, Make Room for Your Uncle," at one o'clock in the morning was quite a relief to one's feelings.

III.—THE PRIMA DONNA.

I HADN'T been a member of the Coachman's Club long before they found out that I'd written that poetry about Jim Dolby, and from that moment they began to look upon me as an authority on books and articles in the newspapers, and I was always appealed to on a question of what Mr. Hutchins, being brought up in the country, called "littery-toor."

I think the landlord told them, because it was him that introduced me to a young newspaper gentleman as "Mr. Winterdyke, our poet."

He was a nice young chap, quite affable and civil spoken, and his name was Mr. Newsome-Jones —with a hyphen—and he was the dramatic and musical critic of a sporting paper, besides doing cricket, and football, and racing, and that sort of thing.

He didn't come into the club, but he knew our landlord very well; and between ourselves our landlord made a book, but I shouldn't like it to go any further, and I expect that's how Mr. Newsome-Jones came to know him.

One evening coming out of the club-room into the private bar with Mr. Hargitt, who was driving Madame Strali Le Brun, the great singer, through

the London season, I introduced him to Mr. Newsome-Jones, seeing they were both, so to speak, in the theatrical and musical line.

Mr. Newsome-Jones, he seemed very interested to hear that Mr. Hargitt was driving the famous soprano and her husband—for she was married—and he asked a lot of questions, and then he said, "Ah, she was well known at Hertford where I was born, when she was a little girl."

And one thing led to another, and he told us the story of the Prima Donna Mr. Hargitt was driving, and I thought it was one of the prettiest I had ever heard.

Some time afterwards I did Mr. Newsome-Jones a service, having heard from the coachman of Lord ——, the great racing nobleman, of a horse his lordship had that was likely to win the Leger, and was then at 50 to 1, and I told him my information, and he had ten pounds on it, it seems, and it won.

After he'd drawn his money he came to me and said, "What can I do for you? May I give you a present?"

I said, "No, sir, thank you—I've done very well myself over the tip, but if you want to do me a kindness, will you write me out that story you told so beautifully to me and Mr. Hargitt about Madame Le Brun, the great singer, that he's driving?"

He laughed and said, "Well, I'm not a story

writer, but I did think of using that myself some day, but you've put a nice little parcel in my pocket, and I'll do it for you."

A fortnight after he sent it to me, and when I met him I said, "May I do what I like with it?" and he said, "Of course you may." And having heard it myself at our club, or at least in the house where our club is held, and it being my property, I don't see why I shouldn't tell it as one of my recollections.

I just copied it out from Mr. Newsome-Jones's writing, because I'm sure I couldn't have told it the way he has, not being a journalist, and so finding my pen as hard to drive and harder sometimes than a jibbing horse. He called it on the top—

OUR 'STRALIA.

She was a little maid of all work, and they called her 'Stralia, because her father was on his way to Australia when she was born. He was a sailor on board one of the big passenger ships. When 'Stralia first saw the light it was in a little room in a cottage on Hertford Heath, where her mother was staying with her married sister. 'Stralia's other name was Brown. Jim Brown, her father, met with an accident while on shore in Sydney, and died in the hospital there, and Mrs Brown, who had been weak and ailing after 'Stralia's birth, did not long survive the shock.

Mrs. Brown's married sister was not well off. Her husband was employed on the railway and she took in washing. Moreover, she had children of her own, and when poor Susan Brown had been laid to rest in the little churchyard on the Heath, Laban Furlong and his wife received the condolences of the neighbours on the unpleasant position in which they found themselves with regard to the orphan baby who had been left on their hands.

There was a whisper of the workhouse for the poor little mite, but neither Laban nor his wife would hear of that. "She's my own sister's child, after all," said Mrs. Furlong, "and none of our family's been in the workhouse yet, and please God, never will be. Me and Laban'll have to make the best of it."

The Furlongs did make the best of it, and little 'Stralia grew up a healthy child, and had a fairly happy existence. But when she was seven years old Mrs. Furlong presented Laban with another arrow for his already well-filled quiver, and the new baby, as soon as it was carryable, fell to 'Stralia's charge. From the arrival of the new baby 'Stralia dated the beginning of that sense of responsibility which gradually made her a careworn, nervous, anxious little "mother" before she was eight years old.

The new baby and the increasing needs of a growing family played sad havoc with Laban's

income, and when 'Stralia was ten it was decided that she must begin to earn her own living, and find her food by day and her bed by night under somebody else's roof. A place was eventually obtained for her with Mrs. Peckover, the greengrocer's wife in Hertford, who, having also an increasing family, found it difficult to do the housework and attend to the children and serve in the shop all at the same time, while her husband was going his rounds with his horse and van.

With tears in her eyes and a farewell hug to the children all round, 'Stralia set out one day in the carrier's cart, her little wooden box—the first property she had ever had in her life—slung on behind the tail-board, and was duly deposited at the greengrocer's shop, Mrs. Peckover receiving her at the door with a bunch of carrots in one hand and a cabbage in the other, and something she intended for a reassuring smile upon her face. 'Stralia curtseyed in her best Sunday-school manner to her new "missus," made a mental note that the vegetables didn't look nearly as nice and fresh as those her uncle grew in their own little garden on the Heath, and took an instant and uncontrollable aversion to the coals. They depressed her, and their grim blackness entered into her soul.

'Stralia was terribly unhappy for a day or two. Everything was so new and strange to her. But when the strangeness had worn off she settled

down, and though the work was hard and the children troublesome, she found considerable solace for her woes in the joy she felt at being allowed to help in the shop on Saturday nights.

To take up a paper bag and reach over into the shop window for a handful of plums, or apples, or greengages, or tomatoes, or pears, and then put them in the scale and weigh them, and take the coppers and say "Thank you," was something which to the little maid-of-all-work contained all the elements of romance. She had played at keeping shop often with her little cousins when the stock-in-trade had been gravel and mould from the garden or potato parings, or bits of cabbage stalks, but now she was in a real shop, selling real things to real grown-up customers for real money, and she felt that she had taken a distinct step forward in life.

It wasn't a very grand shop, of course, or they wouldn't have sold coals. Many of the customers on Saturday night were poor people, labourers and their wives, and work girls, and there were a great many boys who bought the windfalls and the "specked" plums, and didn't want a paper bag, but held out their caps to be filled instead. Some of the boys seeing 'Stralia so busy, and hearing her talk to the customers in such a business-like way, saying, "What can I get you, ma'am?" "What is it, please, sir?" rather looked up to her, and when it came to their turn to be served called her "Miss."

She served so well and so smartly that Sam

Peckover was heard to say to a neighbour, "I'm blest if that gal ain't better in the shop than the missus!" and that was a good deal for Sam to say, for Susan Peckover was his ideal of what a woman and a wife ought to be, and he bowed down before her and worshipped her after eight years of matrimony, just as he had bowed down before her and worshipped her when she was pretty Susan Gilmer, only daughter and heiress of Job Gilmer, verger of the parish church on Sundays and jobbing shoemaker all the week, and Sam was a young man going the rounds with a coal van for his employer.

Mrs. Peckover wasn't a bit jealous, because she had also confided to a female neighbour that 'Stralia was the handiest gal she had ever set her eyes on, and a wonder with children. Now all this admiration, which reached her ears in a roundabout way. did not turn 'Stralia's head, but it made her very, very happy—so happy that she found herself singing aloud over her work in sheer lightness of heart. When 'Stralia sang in the parlour people coming into the shop would stop and listen and say to Mrs. Peckover, "That's a sweet voice—who is it?" and Mrs. Peckover would reply, "That's 'Stralia, the little gal that helps me in the housework."

The children were put to bed early in the evening, but the youngest was left on the sofa in the back parlour, well tucked in, and with a barricade of chairs, so that Mrs. Peckover or 'Stralia could

always run in and see if it was all right and get to it quickly if it cried.

Nothing quieted that child so much as a lullaby that 'Stralia sang, and so of an evening that lullaby was in constant requisition, and the old women in for cabbages or bundles of rhubarb, and things of that sort, would hear a sweet rich voice singing, and would stand entranced until it was over, and quite forget to argue about the quality or price of the cabbages or the rhubarb.

But nobody was so affected by 'Stralia's singing as a boy who came every Saturday night to do his father's marketing—a boy who had been the first to call her "Miss" when she was selling in the shop. He was a pale-faced boy, with beautiful, big violet eyes, and hair that all the rough boys in the town teased him about because he wore it long. Little Carl Hecht did not mind being teased about his hair, but his pale, sensitive face always flushed and the tears came into his eyes when the boys called him "Humpy."

Carl Hecht was not a hunchback, but he had had a fall when a child, and had sustained an injury which had caused his back to grow out a little and his head to be bent forward. His father had been a music master in Hertford and had taught the piano and the violin, but of late years the old musician had suffered constantly from rheumatism in the hands and was no longer able to play. He lived in three little rooms with his wife and his son.

The wife earned a little by dressmaking, and Carl, the son, was in the office of a local auctioneer and surveyor, and earned seven shillings a week, all of which he brought home to his mother and father. He spent his evenings at home, his sole delight being his father's violin, and the old man taught him all that he could and listened to him with a wistful look in his eyes. "Ah, mein sohn," he would say in the broken English which had never mended during the twenty years he had been in England, "I never play like dat! We shall not live to see it, but some day you shall be a great artist. Ah, if I had but de money, den should you have masters!"

One evening old Mr. Gilmer, the verger, came to have tea with his daughter and his son-in-law, and sitting out in the little backyard smoking his pipe with Sam, to be out of the way while the children were being washed and toiletted for night, he heard 'Stralia singing to the baby. He went home full of it, and the next day told the Vicar all about it, and the Vicar went off straightway to see if Mrs. Peckover would allow 'Stralia to join a little choir he had formed, which sang at church entertainments and penny readings. And so it came about that one night in every week 'Stralia in a neat little black straw hat and her best frock went to the big room of the parish schools and learnt songs and glees and choruses, and was made much of for her sweet voice and became a great favourite with the Vicar and his wife and the young lady who played the piano.

It was at these Thursday evenings that 'Stralia first heard Carl Hecht play the violin.

There was music in the soul of both of them—the little maid and the lad—and that drew them together with a great sympathy. It was a sight to see 'Stralia's face when Carl played. She seemed to be in another world, and everything around her was forgotten. And when 'Stralia sang alone, practising one of the simple songs the Vicar loved to have her sing on entertainment nights, Carl would sit absorbed with his great violet eyes so moist that now and then the long lashes glistened in the gas-light.

"The little girl who sings so nicely" became in time quite a local celebrity in Hertford. At the entertainments and on practice nights she was "Miss Brown" to everybody except the Vicar and his wife and the young lady at the piano. The Vicar did say "Australia, my dear," once, but everybody tittered and the Vicar's wife told him not to do it again, for it really sounded quite ridiculous, and remarked that it was a mercy people didn't often name their children that way, or they might some day have to find a convenient diminutive for Jericho or Jerusalem, or even Mesopotamia.

But in spite of her success and the deference paid her, 'Stralia was just the same willing, modest, hard-working girl, and went about her duties at Mrs. Peckover's as loyally as ever, and in the Peckover family circle there was nobody like our "'Stralia."

One day a great London lady came to stay at the Vicar's, and she heard 'Stralia sing. The lady was very rich and passionately devoted to music. She told the Vicar that if 'Stralia were properly trained she would one day be a great singer. It was a shame to let the girl go on serving in a greengrocer's shop.

A week afterwards the lady, who was leaving for London, called and saw Mrs. Peckover, and upset her very much. She wanted 'Stralia. Sam referred the lady to Laban Furlong, and a fortnight later 'Stralia, with tears in her eyes, bade the Peckovers good-bye. She would have stayed where she was happy and was making others happy, but Sam and his good wife wouldn't hear of it. They had grown to love her too well to be selfish when there was such a golden chance for the little orphan girl.

Six months afterwards the old music master had some good news from Germany. His younger brother, with whom he had quarrelled years before, had died in Dresden without wife or child, and on his deathbed had left his property to his only relative, his elder brother Carl. It wasn't a very large sum, but it was enough to let the old man end his days in peace and comfort, and better than all it enabled him to go and live abroad and to devote his son to the art which he already loved so well.

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Ten years passed away and brought many

changes to Hertford Heath. Laban Furlong met with an accident on the line and could work no more, but there came to him from time to time money from his niece 'Stralia who was away in Italy, and who wrote bright cheery letters to her aunt and uncle and her cousins, telling them how kind her patroness had been to her and what a strange new world had opened to her since she left Hertford. She was getting on splendidly, everybody said, and she hoped some day to turn the benefits which had been showered on her to good account.

And one memorable year 'Stralia herself came over to see her old friends. She had grown so tall and beautiful and was so elegantly dressed that when she came into the little shop Sam and Susan Peckover didn't know her, but thought she was some young lady staying with one of the county families.

But when the beautiful young lady said, "Oh! Mr. Peckover, don't you know me? I'm 'Stralia," the greengrocer stepped back in such astonishment that he sat right down on a basket of plums, and Mrs. Peckover, who had been serving over-ripe greengages to a little boy, said, "Oh! my dear, my dear," rushed into the back kitchen, washed her hands hurriedly at the sink, and then ran back into the shop, threw her arms round the young lady's neck, and gave her half a dozen motherly kisses, and then had a good cry.

And when the children came home from school they found a young lady sitting in the big parlour on the sofa, and their father and mother worshipping her with their eyes, and listening to her open-mouthed. And when the young lady got up and stooped down and kissed them, and called them by their Christian names, they felt quite shy until their mother said, "It's 'Stralia!" and then I don't think they quite believed it for a time.

That same afternoon a fly stopped at the little cottage on Hertford Heath, and the same beautiful young lady got out and pulled open the little wooden garden gate and went straight into Laban Furlong's cottage, and the entire family, who were gathered together for tea, rose up in astonishment and dropped curtseys, except Laban, who rose as quickly as his poor lame leg would let him and touched his forehead respectfully with his forefinger.

But when the young lady laughed and said, "Oh, Auntie, don't you know me?" there was one united shriek of "'Stralia!" and happiness and wonderment and excitement reigned in that little cottage till eight o'clock, when the fly came for "the young lady," for 'Stralia had to go back to London.

That was after she had been away only six years. Then she went abroad again, and they heard from her from time to time, how she was singing in opera in the small Continental cities, and how kind everybody was to her, and what nice things were said of

her by the musical gentlemen who wrote in the newspapers and by the managers of the opera houses. The Furlongs stared a long time at a programme she sent them with a lot of foreign language all over it, and a red cross against one name, "Signorina Strali Le Brun," and they would never have recognised their kinswoman 'Stralia Brown under that title if she hadn't put a little note at the bottom explaining things. They knew that she must certainly be getting on very well because of the generous gifts of money that came to help them over bad times, and Mrs. Furlong was never tired of telling everybody how Providence had rewarded them for not letting "poor Susan's child" go to the workhouse.

Of course everybody on Hertford Heath knew how 'Stralia had got on from the Furlongs, and a good many people in Hertford from the Peckovers, and for a long time there was quite a desire among the cottagers' wives to adopt an orphan with a voice; but orphans with voices of the right sort didn't come along.

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It was the height of the London season, and Covent Garden Theatre was crowded. It was a brilliant audience, and everybody was on the tiptoe of expectation. A new Marguerite was to make her first appearance in England, and rumour had for a long time past been busy with the fame of the young English singer, whose nom de théâtre was

Strali Le Brun. She was understood to have achieved considerable success on the Continent, but this was her most ambitious effort. There was no more eager or excited person present that night than one of the violinists in the splendid orchestra that had been brought together by the Impresario. The violinist was a pale-faced young man with a slightly deformed back and glorious violet eyes. At the first rehearsal with the band, when the new Marguerite came on he had been so astonished that he could hardly play. At first he had believed that he was making a mistake. But the "Strali Le Brun," and the voice, and his remembrance of a girlish face in a greengrocer's shop in Hertford, gradually convinced him that the new Marguerite was the little girl who had won his passionate boyish devotion.

She did not recognise him. She had eyes only for the conductor, and after all she would not be likely to look for Carl Hecht among that brilliant band of picked musicians.

It was a triumph for the new Marguerite from start to finish. After each act the curtain was raised again and again, and the sweet modest English prima donna, with her fair girlish face and gentle manner, had to be led on to receive the plaudits of the house.

When the curtain fell on the last act the great audience rose in its excitement, and the scene was indescribable. The young girl with whose name

all England would be ringing to-morrow, carried away by her emotion, could not keep back the tears that welled up into her eyes, and at last streamed down her cheeks.

She saw nobody, she knew nobody. She tottered rather than walked on with Faust. Then the audience called for her alone, and the Impresario took her by the hand. She could not have gone on by herself—she would have fallen.

The cheers rang round the house and the hands of the vast assembly came together in a tumult of applause.

Suddenly there was silence. Marguerite gave a little cry and reeled. The manager put his arm out and caught her.

And in that moment of silence the sound of a great sob came from the orchestra, and every eye was turned in that direction. One of the violinists had fallen forward in a dead faint.

The new Marguerite heard of it in her dressing-room, when the artists and the habitués privileged to come behind were crowding round her and making charming speeches to her.

"Ah," said the Impresario, "it was a wonderful effect. Fancy how you must have carried him away."

"Poor fellow!" said the new Marguerite gently; "you must let me send him a little message of sympathy. I hope he is not really ill. Who is he?"

"A brilliant young fellow," said the Impresario, "but unfortunately he is slightly deformed—his name is Carl Hecht."

"Carl Hecht!" exclaimed the prima donna with a little cry. "Ah, you must let me see him—bring him to me—bring him to me." Then she whispered to the manager, "When everybody has gone."

* * * * * *

A year later the one topic of conversation in musical London was the approaching marriage of the famous young prima donna, Miss Strali Le Brun, with a young violinist who had played in the orchestra the night of her début.

But there was no grand wedding in London, as had been anticipated. One glorious autumn morning the little church on Hertford Heath saw a quiet little family reunion. Mr. and Mrs. Furlong and the "children," Mr. and Mrs. Peckover and their boys and girls, were there, and a few of the old folks who had known the young couple who were about to become man and wife.

The clergyman took his place, and Carl Hecht came out of the vestry and stood at the altar rail. Then the organ pealed, and a fair English girl, dressed in a neat travelling costume, came up the aisle, leaning on Sam Peckover's arm. Sam was blushing all over his honest face, and Susan Peckover was so carried away by the idea of her good man acting as "father" to "our 'Stralia" that she

burst out crying, and Mrs. Furlong, not knowing what to do, patted her on the back, and said, "There —there—you'll be better presently—don't 'ee take on, Mrs. Peckover—don't 'ee take on!"

And so Carl Hecht and 'Stralia Brown were made man and wife, and went back to Laban Furlong's cottage for a little while, and when all the kissing and hugging and crying were over a brougham came to the door and "the happy pair" drove away to Hertford Station en route for the fair Italian lakes, where their honeymoon was to be spent.

And Sam Peckover flung a slipper after them and, nothing more appropriate occurring to him at the moment, shouted "Hooray!"

* * * * * *

When my wife had finished Mr. Newsome-Jones's—with a hyphen—story, she said to me, "I wish as it had been you as drove them young people, John, instead of Mr. Hargitt."

Now, I don't think driving opera and theatrical people is a great catch, seeing the way you have to wait about all winds and weathers, and the late hours, but I wouldn't have minded being out night after night till daybreak to have been coachman to a prima donna like "our 'Stralia."

IV.—ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S JUDGES.

It was the custom in our club among a good many of the members to call each other by their masters' or mistresses' names. For instance, one would say to the other, "Have you seen the Duke of Birmingham this evening?" and somebody would answer, "No, he told me Lord Mount Severn had an order for the theatre, and was going to take him with him." Or perhaps the waiter would come in and say that somebody had come round from the stables to know if Lady Droitwich was in the club, and Mr. Hutchins would answer, "Yes, but he went away an hour or more ago with Sir Thomas Twemlow."

I haven't done this, but have given the members their real names, because it would be confusing to call them dukes and earls and ladyships and that sort of thing, the general public not understanding it as we did. And I must say it was confusing to me at first when I began to be spoken to in the club way as Sir Walter Randall; and one evening, while I was standing at the bar, talking to the landlord about a horse as I'd heard was real good business for the Cesarewitch from my third man as had a younger brother in the stable, you might have knocked me down with a feather, as the

saying is, when Mr. Hargitt came out and said, "Hullo, Sir Walter, the Marquis o' Hartington's left word wi' me that it's his missus's birthday to-morrow, and he'd be glad if you and your missus would go round to supper at ten, as they're having a few friends."

But of course I got used to it in time, and took it quite natural, and fell into the way myself, and really there's nothing in it, because everybody at a railway station puts his head out of window and calls "Smith!" when he wants a newspaper, or if you are driving and a big van comes across your pole, you call out, "Now then, Maple—or Pickford or Shoolbred, as the case may be—where are you coming to?"

It was through thinking of this custom at our club when I was looking over things I'd jotted down in my pocket-book (the missus having gone to see her sister from the country off at Liverpool Street and me stopping at home to look after the children, she being that nervous that though they were in bed and asleep, she couldn't bear the idea of them being left) that I remembered Mr. Justice Tressider and the story he told us at the club one night when the conversation turned on a scandal in high life in which a great lawyer who was in the House of Lords had been found bleeding in his own drawing-room with a pistol in one hand and a blackmailing letter in the other. It had been kept from the papers; and lucky it was so, for he got

better, and it was only in our circles, so to speak that anything ever got known about it.

We always called Mr. Welch—that was the coachman's name—Mr. Justice Tressider, and many were the jokes we had with him when any great trial was on which his governor was sitting on. But he was a faithful servant, and never breathed a word of the strange life drama, so to speak, that he knew all about, until poor Sir George Tressider—that was his lordship's name—had gone where scandal didn't matter, dying, the doctors said, from a stroke of apoplexy, but, as we all said when we'd heard Mr. Welch's reminiscences, more likely of a broken heart and worry.

A fine old fellow was Sir George, a handsome, broad-shouldered specimen of an English gentleman, but not particularly happy with her ladyship, who was a lot younger than him, and by what Mr. Welch let out she must have been a tartar.

But Sir George was over head and ears in love with her when he married her late in life, and would have given her the earth, as the saying is, if she'd asked for it. If she'd been different perhaps he might have found a true friend in her, and have confided the great trouble of his life to her, but he was more afraid of her knowing it than he was of the world finding it out, and it was that that handicapped him from the first.

It was about a fortnight after Sir George had found the peace he never had before, with all his

greatness and prosperity, that Mr. Welch, sitting at the club and hearing us talking about the scandal of the nobleman lawyer who had tried to take his life, told us all about his late master.

"Poor Sir George!" he said, almost with tears in his eyes, "he was a real good 'un, but his life was made a hell for him by a woman, as many a man's has been and is, and will go on being as long as there are any bad 'uns left."

"Her ladyship?" says I.

"No," says Mr. Welch, "she was only a tartar—the woman as drove my poor master to destruction was a real right down Jezebel."

"What!" said Mr. Hutchins, drawing a mouthful of smoke out of his churchwarden, and blowing it up to the ceiling, "you don't mean to say as her Majesty's judges that hang us and divorce us, and punish us for our transgressings, get mixed up with petticoats at their time of life?"

"It wasn't at his time o' life as he got mixed up with her," said Mr. Welch. "It was when he was a bachelor a-going on circus, or whatever they call it, that he had the bad luck to get into the toils as were the arms of a octopus round him for the rest of his days.

"I didn't drive him day after day to the courts for ten years without getting to know a lot of his affairs, and hearing things, but the first real eye-opener I had was one winter evening about six as he was getting into his brougham, and a tall, well-

dressed woman of about forty, I should say, came up and touched him on the shoulder and called him 'George.'

"I turned round natural enough, and I shall never forget his face. It was as white as a sheet of writing-paper.

"'Go away!' he said, and got in and pulled the door to and called out, 'Home.'

"But the woman—for I can't call her a lady—caught hold of the handle of the door and pulled it open again, and I didn't know what to do, but felt myself going hot all over for fear anybody should see one of her Majesty's judges being treated like that.

"While I was hesitating whether to drive on with the door open or not, the lady got into the brougham as cool as you please, and then put her head out of the window and told me to drive to the Marble Arch. As Sir George didn't put his head out of the other window and say 'No,' I supposed he meant me to take the order, and I whipped up my horses and drove as fast as a fire-engine, in a manner of speaking. I had an idea that the sooner I got to the Marble Arch the better Sir George would like it.

"When I pulled up the lady got out. I suppose on the way she and Sir George had settled matters, for she walked away without a word, and Sir George put his head out and said 'Home,' but his voice was trembling and I knew he was upset.

"When we got to the house Sir George got out

of the brougham and stood looking at the horses a minute as though he was making up his mind. Then he said to me quietly, 'Welch, I would rather you didn't mention this—this incident—to anyone.'

"I touched my hat and said, 'Certainly not, sir; I hope I know my place better!' and he gave a deep sigh and went indoors.

"I didn't say anything—not even to my missus, because, as you gentlemen know, women ain't to be trusted with secrets—but I saw that Sir George was worrying, and every day I noticed the change in him. He seemed to have got ten years older all at once. Says I to myself, 'It's that baggage!' and I felt very sorry for my poor old governor, for if this was one of the faults of his young days she was evidently making him pay pretty dear for it.

"But I got to know a lot more one afternoon as I was waiting outside the courts. A young fellow came out to me, a very nice young fellow he was, who was a sort of secretary, I suppose you call it, to Sir George at the Law Courts, and he says to me, 'Whip round sharp and wait in —— street. Sir George is coming out at the back.'

"I don't know what made me say it, something in his face, I suppose, but it was out without thinking. 'Is it her?' I said.

"He looked at me hard for a minute, then he said, 'Oh, you know, do you? Yes, it is. She was in court, going to make a scene, but we got her into his private room, and he'll slip out the back way.'

"I went round, and presently Sir George came out, looking for all the world like a hunted criminal as he'd been trying, more than one of her Majesty's judges, and he made a dash into the brougham, and I drove off without waiting for orders.

"After that me and the young fellow got more friendly, and he told me that there'd been awful scenes in the judge's private room. It seems as this person, who was a Mrs. Roberts, was treating him shameful, and coming there and threatening to make a scandal in open court, and poor Sir George was being made to pay whatever she asked to keep her quiet; because it seems she'd found out he was married and where he lived, and was always threatening to come and make a disturbance at the house.

"It seems he'd tried some years ago, before he was made a judge and was only an eminent Q.C., to get out of her clutches, and made a handsome settlement, but she'd got rid of everything, and suddenly made up her mind to play a big game, and now he was a judge she thought he was at her mercy.

"If I was to tell you all the dreadful things that young fellow told me it would touch your hearts, if they weren't made of stone. It made me shudder, sitting on the box and listening to him as he kept guard—for that's what he did now, watching up and down the street for Jezebel every afternoon—to hear of one of her Majesty's judges, a grave,

grey-haired, handsome English gentleman, sitting in an armchair in his gloomy room, his head bowed down, and that creature raving at him and insulting him, and him powerless to do anything. But the most dreadful thing of all was when she came one afternoon, flushed and excited, and evidently not master of herself, so to speak, and when he summoned up the courage to call to his secretary and say, 'By Heaven, I won't stand it! Put that woman out and let her do her worst!' and then the tigress struck him across the face with her umbrella.

"He jumped back, the secretary said, as if he had been stung by a serpent, and then he fell on his knees and prayed to God to give him strength to keep his hands off her.

"She wanted him to hit her. She'd have had him fast and tight then, for she wouldn't have hesitated a minute to go out and shriek, and call in the police and charge him with assaulting her.

"He told the secretary all about it. How years ago he'd been led away to take up with her when she was a bold, handsome young woman, who gave out that she was the widow of a naval officer, but it turned out afterwards that she was a married woman all the time, and her husband was steward on one of the big passenger vessels that go to Australia. Directly Sir George—he was only plain 'Mr.' then—found that out he saw what a terrible mistake he had made, he paid her a big sum and didn't think of her again, and hoped it

was all over till she turned up that day outside the Law Courts, having been sent home by her husband who had quarrelled with her in China or somewhere where he'd got a berth ashore, and it was then she found out her former victim was a judge and set herself to blackmail him. She wasn't modest in her demands either. She was going to have the best, she said, directly she saw what an easy job she'd got, and the best she did have too. Diamonds and silks and furs fit for a duchess, and it was champagne and brandy all day long, and when the money was gone down she came on my poor old governor and made a scene and terrified him till she got what she wanted.

"Of course, I dare say people who've never been anything but good would say it was his fault, and he was only paying for his own folly, but I know what a fine good-hearted man he was, and how he worshipped his wife, and would have given the world to have undone the past. And I know it was about his wife he worried most, for like all the women who are tartars she'd got every bit of love that was in his heart, and that's what your mild, meek, kind, gentle women never get—leastways, not as a rule, as I daresay many of you gentlemen can bear me out.

"I could see that he was breaking down with the strain on him, and everybody began to notice how ill he was, though they didn't many of them guess the cause. I went into court one day when he was

sitting at the Old Bailey, having brought a message from her ladyship and a big case being on, and my heart ached when I saw him sitting on the bench with a grey look on his face, trying to fix his mind on what he was hearing that a man's life hung upon, and it hurt me so to see him like that, knowing what he was suffering, that I couldn't stand it, and went out again.

"I could see that it was slowly killing him, and I thought to myself that it must be awful for him to listen to that particular case, for the man in the dock was being tried for the murder of a woman who had driven him mad by her wicked conduct to him.

"When I got outside the court I found the young fellow that I've told you about. He was talking to the policeman who was on duty at the door. He came after me and told me that he'd had to get the policeman to help him, as the woman had come there that day drunk, and had tried to get into the court, and he had to tell him to keep her out whatever happened, as she had been threatening more than ever lately, and really had got so bad now that she was hardly responsible for her actions.

"That evening I had to go to the house for orders about ten o'clock, and when I went into the servants' hall to get the footman to let Sir George know I was there I found all the servants in a state of excitement and all talking together, and I knew something had happened.

"It seems that about nine o'clock, just after

dinner was over, and my lady was in the drawing-room and Sir George was going over the notes he'd made at the trial in his library over his cigar, a ring had come at the front door bell, and when the footman had answered it a woman had walked straight into the hall and said, 'Tell your master a lady wishes to see him.'

"The man saw that the lady, whoever she was, was wild looking, and staggered as she walked, and so he said that Sir George wasn't at home, and she'd better leave a message, and with that he tried to edge her back so as to get her the right side of the front door.

"But she gave him a push that nearly sent him backwards into the hall fire and yelled out, 'He'll see me if you say who I am. Tell him Mrs. Roberts is here.'

"Sir George must have heard the noise, for he opened the library door and came out, and then that Jezebel, at the top of her voice, began to abuse him and call him all the names she could lay her tongue to, and some of the other servants came up, and poor Sir George stood paralysed, not knowing what to do.

"The footman told me afterwards it was terrible, and he was so horrified that he took the woman by the shoulders to push her out, and told one of the other servants to go and fetch a policeman.

"'Fetch your police!' yelled the creature; 'fetch 'em, and let 'em know what I've got to say about

that villain yonder who dares to sit on the bench and send his betters to gaol!' Then she began to storm and shriek like a maniac, and swore she'd smash the place, and before they could stop her she made a dash at a big china vase that stood in the hall and knocked it off the pedestal, and it shivered into a thousand pieces on the floor.

"At that moment my lady, hearing the smash, came out of the drawing-room, and the woman knew who she must be, and went up to her, and pointing to Sir George, shrieked out everything, and a good deal that I dare say was lies.

"Her ladyship, who, although she was a tartar, was a lady every inch of her, stared at the woman and waited till she stopped to take breath. Then she said to her very quietly, 'If you have anything to say to my husband you can say it to him wherever you have been in the habit of meeting him. This is my house, and if you don't go out of that door this minute I shall send my servants for a policeman and give you into custody.'

"There was something in her ladyship's quiet voice that took the wind out of the virago's sails. She stared at her for a minute, then she gave a drunken laugh and looked at Sir George.

"'I told you I'd do it, and now I've done it!" she said, 'and I hope you like it!' and with that she tossed her head and walked out of the front door and down the steps as straight as her condition would allow her to.

"It had all happened before I got there, and of course the servants were full of it. 'What will her ladyship do?' they were asking each other, and they said of course it was all true because Sir George had never said a word.

"The maid-servants were very sorry for him, and said it was infamous, and the woman ought to have been locked up, but the footman, who was new, and one of them nasty sneering fellows who never have a good word for anybody, and was always talking about his 'rights' and the sort of stuff that you hear in Hyde Park of a Sunday afternoon half a mile off if you aren't deaf, said, 'And him a judge, too! But, lor, I dare say they're no better than other folks, all the lot of 'em, if the truth was only known!'

"I'm pleased to say that the page boy, a young nipper of sixteen, had the manliness to tell him to shut up, which I'd have done myself and in stronger language, perhaps, if it hadn't been that the thought of poor Sir George and his misery so got hold of me that I felt a big apple in my throat, and went up the area steps and back to the mews without saying a word to anybody.

"Her ladyship left the house the next day. She'd gone on a visit to some friends in the country, it was said, but I knew what that visit meant and so did my poor old governor.

"He never sat on the bench as one of Her Majesty's judges again. The next day there was a paragraph in the papers, and it said he'd been

taken suddenly ill and ordered perfect rest. A few days afterwards his valet, Mr. Tompkins, went into his room to take him the post and the morning papers and found him kneeling by the side of the bed fully dressed, his hand clutching the bed clothes.

"The doctor said he had had an apoplectic seizure and had fallen down like that and died, but I say it was grief and worry.

"Mrs. Roberts? Oh, yes. I heard of her again. That young fellow told me as she went clean out of her mind with the drink and took to coming to the Law Courts and jabbering, but all they could get out of her was that she wanted to see 'one of Her Majesty's judges.'

"She got such a nuisance that at last the police took her to the workhouse, and she was put in the lunatic asylum.

"Which, considering the way as lunatics are pampered nowadays, was a deal better fate than she deserved."

* * * * *

Of course, I told my missus the story after I'd heard it at the club from Mr. Welch, because I tell her everything. I expected she'd be sorry for poor Sir George, but when I said it was dreadful to think what he must have suffered sitting on the bench and never knowing when he was going to be scandalised by that Jezebel, she bridled up and said, "Well, after all he brought it on himself."

That's so like a woman, isn't it?

[illegible]

There [illegible]
than [illegible]
country [illegible]
see [illegible]
old [illegible]
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chariot [illegible]
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dred [illegible]
used [illegible]
were [illegible]
The [illegible]
sits with [illegible]
on breeches [illegible]
drab livery [illegible]
crow's hat [illegible]
braid round [illegible]
drive, because [illegible]

is, and couldn't pass a four-wheel cab on the crawl.

Mr. Whichelo wasn't as bad as that, being stoutish, and a stout coachman, whatever you dress him up in, never looks quite unprofessional. But he was an old lady's lot for all that, and drove the Dowager Lady Larkin, relict, as the saying is, of the late Sir Thomas Larkin, Bart., who made a fortune in the East Indies, and was made a baronet for being a member of the Board of Works, and presenting the poor of London with a model lodging-house or something of that sort.

Quite the old-fashioned dame was Lady Larkin, but a good mistress, and Mr. Whichelo was never tired of saying what a kind, charitable soul she was, but trying at times, through never letting him use a whip, and always calling out to him, when a dog was half a mile off, not to run over it, being that tender-hearted about animals that she'd go out of her warm dining-room on a winter's night, with an old woollen shawl over her head, if she heard a cat mewing down an area, fearing it might be a lost one and starving; and if she found it was, she'd come home and have bits of mutton cut off, and send the servant out to throw them down the area.

Mr. Whichelo had come up from the country and got the place through answering an advertisement when he was middle-aged. In the years he'd been a London coachman he'd worn off a

good bit of his country rust, and when he joined the club, he being a bachelor and lonely of an evening, and fond of his pipe and glass, he soon made himself a favourite through his shrewd, old-fashioned way of talking and his nice manners, which, for one in his position, were those of the real old English gentleman. He was a good example to some of the stuck-up, showy, slangy London servants, that gave themselves airs, and thought they knew everything because they went to music-halls and took in the London sporting papers, smoked their master's cigars, and called each other chappies through hearing their young governors do it.

I took to old Tom Whichelo from the first because I was country bred, like him, and didn't always want to be talking of horse-racing and society scandals, but liked to hear a yarn now and then about ferreting and badger-drawing, and other good old English sports that the Cockneys knew just as much about as they did about growing garden stuff or poultry breeding, and couldn't tell a mushroom from a toadstool if they looked at 'em side by side for a fortnight.

It was one night as the club was almost empty, there being a State concert at Buckingham Palace, and half a dozen other "functions," as the newspapers call them, as well, that me and Tom had the room to ourselves for the best part of a couple of hours, and one thing leading to another, our talk

being all about the country, and what a much healthier, jollier life it was than the dirty streets and the ashphalt and the late hours and the close stuffy holes as some of the best of us had to call "home," he told me about the place he'd lived in before he came up to London and got engaged by old Lady Larkin.

I always knew that he was a fine old fellow, but when he told me the story of the two young ladies he'd been with boy and man and their father before 'em, and how he'd had to leave at last through what happened to them, and I saw the tears come into his honest grey eyes and roll down his cheeks, which were still as rosy as a country apple, I felt that I was talking to one of Nature's gentlemen and a fine old family retainer and a heart that was in the right place.

"I was born on the estate of Squire Barrington in Worcestershire," said Mr. Whichelo, "and before I was thirteen years old I was in the Squire's stables, as my father had been before me and was at the time. 'Handsome Jack Barrington,' I've heard my father say many a time the Squire was called in his younger days, and a fine figure of a man he was when I can recollect him, though getting on in years, and never a straighter rider to hounds in the whole county up to the day of his death.

"It was a fine place for any young fellow to be in, for nothing was stinted at the Friary, as the mansion was called, and there was always plenty

of company and open house in the good old English style, just as you used to read about in the Christmas numbers years ago, and many's the picture my father's cut out of 'em and stuck up on our cottage walls and in the harness room at the Friary, and cheery they was to look at, I can tell you, on a winter's afternoon, with the snow outside and the flare of the big log in our old-fashioned fireplace dancing about on their gay colours.

"If anybody had said in those days that a Barrington would ever come to know the meaning of hunger and poverty, he'd have been looked upon as a born natural, for the Squire's hand was always in his pocket, and there wasn't a man or woman on the estate that wasn't beholden to him as a generous master and a landlord as it was an honour to pay rent to.

"The Squire's wife had died when his two daughters, Miss Agnes and Miss Janet, were little girls, and he idolised them, and when they grew up nothing was too good for them. Sweet, gentle young ladies they were as I can remember them first Mr. Wynterdyke, but always what would be called nowadays, I should say, a bit shy and prim and old-fashioned.

'Having no mother and no brothers, and never having a taste for outdoor sports, they were a good deal alone in the great house, and were, so to speak, brought up by their mother's sister, the

widow of a parson, and they got all their ideas of what ought to be and what oughtn't from her, and there was nobody like their Aunt Priscilla till the day she died, which was at the Friary.

"When they grew up into young women there was plenty of young gentlemen in the county, so gossip said, as would have been glad to marry them, but Miss Agnes and Miss Janet wouldn't leave their father, and clung to each other, not being able to bear the idea of being parted. They let the offers go by and lived on happy and contented, and at last everybody began to say that they would be old maids all their lives.

"Two more lovable ladies, or more looked up to and respected by the cottagers and everybody on the estate, weren't to be found in the county and a blessing to their father in his old age, though it was a sound and hearty one. They were both of them over thirty when the old Squire one night, sitting in his library asleep by the fire, was woke up by the servant to say that Lawyer Oddans, of Worcester, who did all the Squire's business, wanted to see him on most important business.

"The Squire—so the footman told us afterwards—woke up out of his sleep and seemed quite startled, and rose up trembling as the lawyer, looking terribly worried, came in, and the footman went out and shut the door.

"They were in there together for an hour or more, and at half-past ten when Miss Agnes and

Miss Janet went in to wish their father good night he seemed very ill, and the young ladies were alarmed, but he wouldn't hear of their sending for a doctor, and said it was nothing—he was only tired, that was all—and he seemed anxious for them to leave him, as he had not finished talking with Lawyer Oddams.

"They kissed him and, though very anxious, they went to bed, hoping that in their anxiety they had been mistaken about his appearance. It was nearly midnight when the lawyer, who had ridden over, sent a message to the stables for his horse to be brought round, and I brought it to the door myself, little dreaming then what his visit had meant to the Squire and the young ladies. I was head man then, my father having gone to his rest at an honourable old age, and I had been so long with the family that the old place seemed like a home that I should never leave, but end my days in too. The lawyer mounted his horse and rode off, and I wished him good night; but he hardly answered me, and I thought it very odd, he generally being such a pleasant spoken gentleman, especially to us old servants; but I never had any idea what ill tidings he had brought to the old place, and what a heavy heart he was taking away with him.

"I went back to the stables and up to my own room, and went to bed, and I must have been asleep about an hour when I was woke up by somebody ringing away at the stable bell like mad.

"I jumped out of bed and opened the window, and there was one of the men-servants calling out my name.

"'What's the matter?' I said, startled out of my seven senses. 'Is the place afire?'

"'Worse than that,' says he. 'The Squire's fallen down in a fit, and we're afeared he's took for death. You'd better put a horse to, and drive over for the doctor at once.'

"I hurried into my clothes, and ran down and opened the door, and called up one of my helpers, and the young fellow that had brought the news he come in, and told us exactly what had happened, so I could tell the doctor.

"He'd sat up, waiting for the Squire to go to bed, it being his duty to see to the lights being out, and while he was sitting in the servants' hall he heard a sound like a heavy fall, and he ran into the library, and there was the Squire lying senseless on the ground. He called up the butler, and they got him on to a sofa, and then told the young ladies, and they were with the Squire now, but he couldn't speak, only stare at everybody, and move his lips as though he wanted to say something and hadn't the strength.

"As soon as we'd got the horse to, I jumped up and took the reins, and drove off full gallop, for the doctor's house was a couple of miles away.

"But I was back with him in half an hour, the moon, thank goodness! being out, and making it

safe to gallop through the lanes and along the narrow roads, which it wouldn't have been in the dark, for it was a wild bit of country where we were, and I waited at the door to hear the news from Mr. Joslyn, the butler, who came himself, being so anxious about the Squire, and trembling like a child.

"'How is he, Mr. Joslyn?' I said.

"The poor old fellow, who had been in the family for forty years, didn't need to answer me; as soon as he stood in the light of the hall lamp I could read as there wasn't any good news in his face. I went back to the stables, and put the horse on the pillar rein in case I should be wanted to drive the doctor back or go anywhere, and then I went across to the house and sat down with the maids and the men in the servants' hall, where they were all sitting round the fire and looking like ghosts, having been called up from their sleep by the news and grieving, all of 'em, as if it had been their own flesh and blood.

"And the housekeeper, a good motherly old soul, seeing us all looking the picture of misery when she came in, told the maids to make some hot coffee for themselves, and she went to the pantry and got out a bottle of spirits, and said we men folks was to help ourselves.

"About three o'clock in the morning it must have been when Mr. Joslyn, who had been upstairs waiting on the doctor in case he wanted anything,

came downstairs with his eyes red, and dropped into a big chair, and burst out sobbing like a child.

"'It's all over!' he said. 'Oh, my poor master! my poor master.'

"And when he said that, there wasn't a dry eye among us servants, who'd known and loved the family so long.

"Mrs. Leeson, the housekeeper, was the first to speak.

"'I'm going to Miss Agnes and Miss Janet,' she said. 'I'd better go to them, poor young ladies—it'll break their hearts.'

"'They're with him,' said Mr. Joslyn. 'I left them kneeling by his side and praying. I—I don't think I'd go in to them for a minute or two—the doctor's there.'

"We sat quite quiet for a minute, almost hearing our own hearts beat in the solemn death silence that fell on us all, and presently the library bell rang gently, and Mr. Joslyn he went up and came back presently and told me to go and put the horse in to drive the doctor back, and Mrs. Leeson had better go up and try and induce the poor young ladies to go to bed again, as there was nothing to be done now but to get our poor dead master to his bedroom and lay him out.

"It's many a year ago now, Mr. Wynterdyke," said Mr. Whichelo, brushing away a couple of big tears with the back of his hand, "but I can see everything as happened that dreadful night as clear

as if it was yesterday. Ah, it was a night for them as had loved the Barringtons to remember, but there was more to follow, and after the funeral it all came out, having to be known.

"It seems as the news Lawyer Oddams had brought to the Friary that night meant ruin to the Squire and his family. We servants hadn't known it, ours being a village and we not being given to reading law news, but the Squire for many years past had been fighting up in London through his lawyers there, who was employed by Lawyer Oddams, a ruinous thing as they calls a Chancery suit.

"He'd always thought as he was bound to win, it being about estates which had been in his family for generations, and had raised money to carry it on on such of his property as wasn't mixed up with the question, that is to say, the Friary and his Worcestershire estates. And just as everything seemed all clear at last for him to win, the decision had been given against him, and what was more than all, on the same day that it was known, a man —he couldn't have been a gentleman—as had advanced money on the mortgage of the Worcestershire estates, had, through some dirty business as I don't understand, not being a scholar, been able to come down at once and take everything.

"And it was that as had brought Lawyer Od dams over to the Squire's in a hurry that night, he having just found out what a terrible plight his

losing the case—which he declared to his dying day was an infamy and a perjury and every other abomination, and ought never to have been—had brought the Squire to.

"In a month after we laid the Squire to rest in the vault in the parish church everything was sold off, and that London rascal had a lot of London workmen at the Friary, which he was going to live in himself, he said, and we who had been with the family all our lives had grown up on the estate were turned out on the world. But there wasn't one of us as minded that (though it cut us to the heart) half as much as the sight of those two poor orphan ladies, Miss Agnes and Miss Janet, when they bade us all good-bye, white-faced and sobbing, and went out of all that luxury and the place they'd been born in to *earn their own living*.

"They might have saved something from the wreck, but they were too proud. There was more money owing, they heard from the lawyer, than the Squire's property could pay, through the London rascal having taken everything, as it seems by law he could, and they said that as that was so, nothing belonged to them at all.

"There wasn't a house in the neighbourhood as wouldn't gladly have opened its doors to the poor ladies, but they couldn't bear to be taken in out of charity, as they put it, so they went away one afternoon from the little station, getting into a third-class carriage, and nobody looking at them

through respecting their feelings too much. But Jim Groves, the porter, he told me afterwards that when he shut the door of that carriage and touched his cap to them he had to tumble over a hand-barrow and bark his shins, and make himself swear to prevent his making what he called a fool of himself.

"There was one thing as they were spared, poor ladies, and that was the idea of the old horses and the pony that they drove themselves being sold to strangers. I never want to feel as I felt the day them two sweet ladies came into the stables and put their arms round the necks of them dumb creatures as seemed to know all as it meant, and said good-bye to 'em and cried over 'em.

"But they didn't have to suffer agony as it would have been thinking of their favourites being ill-treated and overworked in their old age, for the gentry round about who'd known them and knew what they must feel like behaved nobly, and took the horses among them, paying double what they were worth, and sent word to Miss Agnes and Miss Janet before they left that not a horse out of the stable should ever be sold to hard work, but they should all end their days in peace and comfort with friends who had known and loved Squire Barrington and his daughters."

"Ah," I said, when Mr. Whichelo left off speaking, and stared into the fire as though he was looking many a mile away from London to that

old Worcestershire home of his, "there's lots of tragedies among the big folk just as there is among the poor. It must be dreadful for delicate women brought up like those two poor young ladies to have to turn out after their youth's gone and know what it means to struggle for food and lodging. I always think there's no poverty so hard to bear as that as comes to grown-up people as have been rich and never known the want of anything."

"Yes," said Mr. Whichelo, "but it's hardest when it comes on them as has never done anything to deserve it. Ah, poor ladies! it would have been better for them if they'd been taken and put away in the old churchyard with their mother before the ruin came!"

"I suppose you never saw them again, Mr. Whichelo?"

"Yes, I did, soon after I came to London," said the faithful old fellow with a deep sigh. "I was going to Haverstock Hill to take up a character of a lad as had been recommended to me for the stables, and I went along High Street, Camden Town. It was nine o'clock of a Saturday evening and the barrows were all across the roadway, and them beastly naphtha lamps flaring away and the smoke a-blowing off them fit to poison you, and I saw Miss Agnes with a little reticule on her arm standing looking at a draper's shop where there was a lot of cheap mantles hanging up in the

window. They was labelled 'Our Winter Goods,' and they looked very warm and comfortable for the money.

"It made me go hot, though it was a bitter winter's night, to see my young mistress that had been standing there in the cold with only a thin worn dress and a little old-fashioned tippet on, and her poor thin face, hollow and sunk, and telling a tale as would touch the heart of a stone.

"She looked at the mantles for a long time, then she sighed and gave a great shiver and turned and walked away.

"I thought perhaps I might be able to find out where they lived, so I followed Miss Agnes, taking care to keep behind in the crowd where she couldn't see me, and I followed her to a place called Ferdinand Street, up in the Chalk Farm Road. She stopped at a little sort of stationer's shop and went to the side door and let herself in with a key. I'd noticed that the woman as the shop belonged to was standing at the shop door and nodded to her as she passed, so when she'd gone in I went into the shop and bought a packet of envelopes, and I said, 'You'll excuse me, ma'am, but wasn't that lady as went in just now a Mrs. Jones?' I said that as I made it up, of course, not wishing to make out I knew Miss Agnes.

"'Oh, no,' said the woman, 'that is a Miss Barrington. She and her sister have my top floor.'

"'Oh,' I said, 'I beg your pardon—she was so

like a Mrs. Jones I knew—who used to be a governess.'

"'Oh, they're not governesses. They've been with me for two years. I think they tried to be governesses, but they wouldn't leave each other. They've been ladies, I'm sure, by their ways, but, poor things, they hardly earn enough to keep body and soul together, but they always pay their rent to the minute. I'm afraid sometimes they starve themselves, and the bitterest day they never have a fire.'

"'What do they do for a living?' I said.

"'They take in work from the shirt houses, and they've got a sewing machine, but I'm afraid they don't do very much at it. Poor ladies, it makes my heart ache to see them so devoted to each other, never complaining, always brave and patient. But there—hark at me running on—as if my lodgers' affairs were any interest to you, sir! Your change and thank you.'

"I took my envelopes and my change and went out of the shop and back to the place where I'd seen the mantles. I'd changed the stable and wages cheque that morning, and I'd got a bit of money in my pocket, and I went right into that shop and bought two of the mantles I'd seen Miss Agnes looking at, and had 'em done up, and I gave the shopman the address to send 'em to, and I told him to write on outside, 'With best wishes from an old friend.' I thought that it was better to say

that instead of anything more respectful, for fear they should think it was someone beneath them that had taken the liberty.

"After that I went up once or twice of an evening when I'd done work and waited opposite the house hoping to see them come out.

"And one evening I did, and my heart came right up into my mouth fit to choke me. For Miss Agnes and Miss Janet came out—God bless them! —both together, and they seemed quite warm and comfortable in their *two new winter mantles!*"

* * * * *

Good old Tom Whichelo! It was a fine thing he did, but I'm sure from the way he told it he didn't think anything of it. I told my missus about it when I got home, it being rather late, and she, like most of the women are, was a bit unreasonable, and talked about being woke out of her first sleep.

I told her Tom Whichelo's story, knowing as she'd got a tender heart and she'd understand it and appreciate it, and I only did her justice, for she never said a word while I was telling her the story, only when I'd finished—having a habit of getting the last word—she remarked that, seeing what a kind-hearted, considerate old gentleman Mr. Whichelo was, she was rather surprised at his keeping another woman's husband out till one o'clock in the morning.

VI.—HIS GOOD ANGEL.

I'D had a row with the missus. It was all my fault, of course, because I ought to have remembered how many things a man's wife has to worry her that seem nothing to him but are a great deal to her, especially when she's worn out with a baby cutting its teeth and a bad headache.

She'd answered me rather short for a day or two, but I'd been out a good deal at night with the horses, my second man being bad through having got wet, not having taken his mackintosh and a storm coming on while he was on the rank at the opera. As he was ill I had to do the night work myself, and getting home at two or three in the morning I hadn't had much time for conversation, and when the wife spoke a bit short-tempered I put it down to her being woke up and didn't take much notice.

But the afternoon that we had almost the first real quarrel we'd ever had in our lives I was sitting about reading the newspaper, and she'd just quieted the baby and put him in his crib and was sitting in the easy chair. I heard her drumming with her foot on the floor, but I was wrapped up in a splendid article in the *Daily Telegraph* about an

old Yorkshire squire as had some of the finest horses that ever ran on the turf, and so the drumming went in at one ear and out at the other, as the saying is.

Presently the missus spoke to me. I heard her, but being right in the middle of the article I didn't exactly catch what she said, and so I gave a sort of a grunt that might be taken for a Yes or a No, whichever she liked, and went on reading.

Then all of a sudden the fat was in the fire. It must have been on the fry for a long time before it flared up, but it was a blaze when it did, and no mistake about it.

The missus jumped up with a little hysterical scream, came straight across to where I was sitting on the sofa, seized the paper, scrumpled it up in her hands, threw it on the floor and danced on it, and then she dropped into a chair and began to scream and cry and carry on anyhow.

I was so knocked for a minute that I sat with my mouth wide open staring at her, but as soon as I saw that it was hysterics that she had I got up and tried to soothe her, but that only made things ten times worse. I was a brute—I was a hard-hearted, selfish wretch. I was out half the night, and she was being worn out with keeping things straight and looking after the children, and the baby never giving her a minute's peace with its teeth, and when I did have half an hour at home in the bosom of my family, all I could do was

to sit mumchancing on the sofa reading the newspaper, and never even answering her when she spoke to me.

I said I was very sorry, and told her not to be silly and all that sort of thing, but she went on screaming louder and louder, and the window wide open, and the men down in the yard able to hear every word, and one thing led to another, till at last I lost my temper too, and then she did a thing I wouldn't have believed her capable of. She came to me and seized me by the lappets of my coat and shook me—actually shook me—and then it all came out. The club had got on her brain, she hating it and declaring that it had made me neglect my home, and that it was bad enough for me to be out till all hours when the carriage was ordered, but it was more than flesh and blood could stand for me to go trapesing off to a low public-house drinking with a lot of my boon companions when I ought to have been at home with my devoted wife and my innocent children, and she wasn't going to stand it any longer. She d leave me the children and I could look after them the best way I could, and she'd go home to her mother.

Now if there was one thing that could make me forget what was due to a woman it was Mrs. Wynterdyke's mother. She was the widow of a gamekeeper on Lord ——'s estate in Surrey, and, when her husband died, had been given the lodge

to live in with her unmarried son, my precious brother-in-law as was always getting into debt and borrowing money of my missus unbeknown to me, till I found it out and stopped it, he being a good-for-nothing idle fellow, and no credit to anybody. And Mrs. Wynterdyke's mother was one of those interfering, teach-everybody-else-their-business, suspicious, back-biting old women, that seem to be sent into the world to make mischief and set people by the ears, and had very nearly broken things off between me and my missus when we were courting through her evil tongue. And if ever my wife found fault with me or turned nasty, I always knew that my precious mother-in-law had been writing to her and putting ideas into her head, because my wife was one of those good-hearted, dutiful daughters who are a jolly sight too fond of writing home and telling their family troubles, and when I see her with the pen and ink and a sheet of paper in front of her with "Dear Mother" on it, I always know there'll be a letter come back that won't make the missus any happier.

It hadn't made me particularly agreeable to know that the stable lads were grinning down below and listening to me being raved at, and I suppose the shaking up my poor girl gave me in her nervous, excited state, being hysterical, sent the blood to my head. But at any rate, when she began about her dear mother, I raised my voice too, and it got to be what the story books call "a scene," and at last I

got in such a towering rage that I used language I'd no business to, and put on my hat and coat and banged the door, and told my wife I'd give her a chance of getting into a better temper, and I was going *where* I chose and coming back *when* I chose, and if she didn't like it she could *go* to her dear mother and stop there till she came to her senses.

I was in such a passion when I went out that I walked along the road quite fast, not seeing anybody but talking and muttering to myself, and feeling that I wanted plenty of fresh air to breathe in, I got on top of a 'bus, and went up to Baker-street and into Regent's Park, and called on a friend of mine in some stables there. I stayed up in his room till eight o'clock talking, and then, as luck would have it, he said, "Oh, by the bye, Jack, I'm going to your club to-night with a friend of mine, a member who's promised to introduce me. If you've got nothing to do come with us; it'll be company."

I ought to have said "No," but the devil was in me still and I wasn't in the humour to go back home and perhaps have another row. So I said, "All right, Jim," and as soon as he'd seen his horses done up for the night we went off and called for his friend who was in service at the back of Portman-square, and we three went to the club together.

There were a lot of our fellows there, and we got talking and the time slipped away, and we

were just getting jolly when one young chap as hadn't been married very long got up and said he must go, and some of the others began chaffing him, saying they supposed he'd *got* to go home or else he'd have his hair combed, and a lot of silly nonsense of that sort. But the young fellow only smiled and said, "Chaff away, lads. It's quite true I promised my wife I'd be home early, and I'm going to keep my word, so good-night," and out he went.

"Ah," said old Mr. Hutchins, who was in the chair as usual, "he won't be so anxious to get back home when he's been married as long as some of us have," and a lot of 'em laughed. I didn't, because I was beginning to think that I'd been a bit too rough on my missus, and that perhaps she'd be worrying about me, having come out of her temper; but I'd told my friend about my having a row at home, and I didn't like to get up and go for fear he'd start chaffing me too, and no man likes to be thought to be afraid of a petticoat, though there's precious few that aren't.

And there was another who didn't laugh either, but looked quite grave. He was a quiet, respectable, middle-aged man, who had been brought in as a guest, and was understood to be coachman to a Mr. Hugh Chillcott, a painter, who lived at Holland Park and had pictures in the Royal Academy, and his name was Mr. Goldspink.

When the others were laughing and making their

jokes about the young chap as had gone home because he'd promised his wife, Mr. Goldspink shook his head, and presently he said, "It's all very fine to make fun of that sort of thing, gentlemen, if I may make so bold as to join in the conversation, being a stranger and a guest, but if you knew a story as I know, living with it so to speak, you wouldn't think it a laughing matter."

"If it's a good story we shall be glad to hear it, sir," says our Mr. Hutchins, waving the stem of his long clay politely towards Mr. Goldspink.

"It's a good story, and it's a true story," said Mr. Goldspink, "and it's the story of my governor that I'm proud and happy to be driving now, for a better never trod down shoe leather. He's told me the story many a time, for I come from the same part of the country, and have known his family all my life, and there can't be no harm in my telling it to you.

"He wasn't a great artist when he first married, but a young fellow painting away for his living and selling his pictures to little dealers as sometimes when he was hard up wouldn't give him more than a few sovereigns for them, but he had fallen in love with a sweet young lady as poor as he was, and married her.

"A rough time they had of it, he told me, at first, but they were happy because they loved each other, but after they'd been married two years, and he didn't get on, but was in debt, and had a hard

struggle to keep things going, hoping for what seemed as far away as ever, he began to feel low and out of sorts and to look at everything as gloomy as possible. His young wife tried to cheer him up, but he got right down in his boots, as the saying is, and there's no doubt as his health and his nerves had broke down with the hard work and the worry and the constant struggle and disappointment.

"He began to have long fits of silence on him, and sometimes he would throw his brushes away from him or daub the paint furiously all over what he was doing, and say that it was all no good, and that he ought never to have got married.

"His poor young wife took it terribly to heart, getting it in her head that she was a burden on him, and that but for her he would have got on and that she had ruined his prospects, and all the sunshine seemed to have gone out of both their lives, and she would lie by his side at night and hear him sighing and groaning, for he'd got so that he couldn't sleep, and she began to look thin and haggard and as white as a ghost.

"But in his nervous, over-worked, broken-down state he never noticed it. He always says now he must have been mad, but he didn't see things in their true light in those dark days as he calls them. He would sit for hours in front of the canvas never doing a stroke, and then he would try, and it would be all no good, and he would begin to work himself

up in a rage, and one day when he was cursing his luck and going on like a madman, his young wife came in and tried to comfort him, but he, being out of his mind, as he must have been, turned on her in his passion, and spoke bitter, cruel words to her, words that must have cut her to the heart, and made her really think that he was sorry he had hampered himself with a wife, and would get on better without one.

"He went out that evening, not being able to bear being in the house brooding, and when he came back late from a hotel where a lot of artists used to go and sit in the smoke-room together, he found his wife was not there. She had gone out and left him a note saying that she would never be a burden to him again, and he was to forget her and think of her as dead.

"All his folly and wickedness came home to him then when he thought of that poor girl without a friend driven away by him, and gone God knows where. He rushed out like a madman, and inquired everywhere he thought she might have gone, but there was no news of her. Then he thought she might come back in a few days, and he set to work hard to drown his thoughts, and he painted a picture that was wonderful, and a gentleman happened to come in—a dealer—and, seeing it, he was so struck by it that he bought it unfinished, and gave Mr. Chillcott what is called a commission for another at a price that he had never

hoped to get for years. And he knew then that he had got his foot on the right rung of the ladder, so to speak, and that his troubles were over.

"Then came the dreadful thought—oh! if he could only let his wife know. If she had only been there how happy it would have made him. The day after he had finished the picture that the gentleman had bought he was reading the evening paper, when he saw the account of a young woman with a wedding ring on her finger who had been found in the Regent's Canal, where she must have been many weeks, and instantly the thought came to him that it was his poor young wife. She had gone out that night and drowned herself, and that was why she had never come back or been seen by anyone or written to him.

"The paper he had picked up in the smoke-room of the hotel was an old one, and it said that the body, not having been claimed, had been buried as unknown.

"It was no good his going to the authorities then, he thought, but he decided to do it. If he had been shown the clothes the poor creature had on it would have driven him mad he felt, but he made up his mind he must go. He went back to his rooms and in the night was taken ill, and got worse, and had brain fever with the shock, and it was three months before he was out and about again and able to work, and so he never went to the authorities at all, feeling it was all over and

he must blot out that dreadful part of his life for ever.

"He set to work again, determined to devote himself entirely to his art, but he couldn't forget. He wanted his young wife there to see how he was getting on. He wanted her to know that he hadn't to worry about money any more, that his name was in the papers, and that he was going to be rich and famous, for he was getting orders now faster than he could paint.

"And then to ease his mind he did a strange thing. He made believe that his wife *was* there. He would call her to his side to look at his picture. He would speak tender words to her and tell her that he loved her with all his heart and soul—and all the time he was talking to the empty air. When he had done work and the light was gone he would sit down in the little sitting-room in the dusk and think that she was opposite him, and he would talk to the empty chair where she would have been and say all the loving, tender things that he had said to her when they were sweethearts.

"He had the idea that though his wife was not there her *spirit* was, and that she could see and hear him, and that he was atoning and making her happy.

"And sometimes he would feel like a soft breath on his cheek, and he would turn and clasp the air, thinking he held his dear one to his heart, and

then with tears in his eyes he would ask her to stay always with him and to give him some sign that she knew at last how he loved her.

"When he had his first big cheque and all his debts were paid he went out and bought in a shop a beautiful old-fashioned jewelled ring which she had often looked at and said one day she should like to have—and he brought it home as a present to his dead wife whose spirit was always with him—and in the evening sometimes he would walk out into the lanes and fields with *her*, so he made himself think, and he would say aloud how happy they were and how pleasant it was for them to wander about in the green fields together as they used to do.

"Although he was so much better off he lived on in the little house where he had rooms, not liking to go anywhere she had never lived for fear her spirit would not be happy there, and once at the hotel smoking-room when he got up at ten o'clock and said, 'I must go—my wife will be waiting for me,' all the other artists looked at each other thinking he must be mad, and not knowing that he had got the idea of his wife's spirit being always in the house with him and that he had really begun to believe it.

* * * * * *

"One winter evening just before Christmas Mr. Chillcott had a strange feeling come over him suddenly. He had been very hard at work finish-

ing a picture which was being talked about by artists, for people came to see his pictures now, and everybody said that it would be the making of him, it was so beautiful. It was called 'His Good Angel,' and was a picture of a painter at work, and the spirit of his dead wife looking over him and smiling at him as he worked.

"When he felt so curious he got up and put on his overcoat and went out to walk, for he had been indoors all day. There was a feeling on him that he could not shake off. His picture was finished, and now suddenly there had come to him the idea that everything that helped him was going from him. He was going to be ill again. But the worst feeling of all was that the spirit of his wife had left him. He knew that it was not real. The truth seemed to have come to him suddenly, and he was once more the husband who had driven his young wife from him to die a suicide's death.

"At last he could not bear the thought any longer. 'Ah, no, she is there—there at home waiting for me!' he said to himself. 'Her spirit will not leave me all my life.' He went back home like a man in a dream, and went up into his room. It was all dark, for he had not had the lamp lighted, and the fire had burned down and gone out. He went into the room, trembling and almost hysterical, and closed the door, and his heart sank down in the silence and the gloom. He stretched out his hands in the darkness, and

he cried aloud, 'Marion—my wife—come to me—come to me!'

"Then suddenly he heard a great sob and a cry, and he saw a figure move towards him through the darkness, and a woman put her arms around his neck, and buried her head on his breast and sobbed 'Hugh! Hugh!'

"For a moment he thought it must be his fancy, but at that minute the landlady came in with the lamp, and he uttered a great cry of joy, and then his senses left him.

"It was Marion his wife who was in his arms; it was Marion his wife who was bending over him when he came to his senses again; it was Marion his wife who knelt beside him and whispered, 'Forgive me, Hugh. I love you so—I love you so!'"

* * * * * *

We had all been holding our breath when Mr. Goldspink got to that part of the story, and when he finished there was quite a sigh went round the room, but it was a sigh of happiness. But we didn't understand how it happened, so we asked Mr. Goldspink to tell us, for we were all eager to know

'Well," said Mr. Goldspink, "you see it was this way. It wasn't the poor young lady who had been drowned at all, as, of course, you have guessed. She had gone away to a friend of hers in the country, a young lady who had been her

schoolfellow and had married a schoolmaster, and had started a young ladies' school herself, and she had out of her friendship for Mrs. Chillcott, and pitying her, allowed her to stay with them and help her in the school. She had borne up for a time and had read how her husband was getting famous, and was glad, but at last the love in her heart got too strong for her, and she felt that she must see him again once, if it was only for a little while, and so she had come to London and had gone to the house, and the door had been opened by a servant who did not know her—a new girl.

"She had said 'Mr. Chillcott,' and the girl, not knowing Mr. Chillcott was out, and thinking it was a visitor, had told her to go upstairs, and it was the first door she came to.

"The young lady had gone in and sat down to wait till her husband returned, and had got lost in thought, and when her husband came in in the darkness, could not find her voice or move from where she was until he said, 'Marion, come to me!' and then she had staggered forward and fallen into his arms.

"That's a good many years ago, gentlemen, now, but husband and wife have never been separated since. He's a great man to-day, and they live in a grand house and keep their horses and carriages, and I'm proud to drive them about, and I don't think there's a handsomer or more devoted

couple to be found in the world than my master and his beautiful wife—God bless her!"

* * * * * *

When Mr. Goldspink had finished I sat still for a moment with a big apple in my throat. Then I got up and I said, "I must wish you good-night, gentlemen—I'm going home to my wife."

When I got home my heart was in my mouth, it was all so quiet. I opened the door of our sitting-room. My wife was sitting at the table working. The lamp was at her elbow, and I could see that she looked very white and her eyes were red with crying.

I went across the room and put my arms round her and lifted her up and kissed her, and then, my voice trembling like a girl's, I said, "Jenny—it was all my fault—forgive me, dear, and I'll never speak another cross word or make you angry with me again as long as I live."

And God helping me I never will.

VII.—THE LADY'S MAID'S LEGACY.

WE hadn't seen Sam Batchelor at the club for a long time, but we didn't particularly wonder at it, because he'd told us that his people were going to Torquay for three months, one of the young ladies being in delicate health, and he was expecting to have to go with them. He was a capital fellow, was Sam, being odd and quaint, and lively in his conversation, and always going about with his eyes open like myself. I used to like to talk to him because he was one who took notice, and didn't let much that was worth studying go by him.

His wife and my wife had got friendly through all four of us going to the opera together one night with orders that Mr. Hargitt—the coachman who drove the prima donna I told you about, who was once "our 'Stralia"—had given Mr. Batchelor And after that my wife would go round sometimes and have tea with Mrs. Batchelor, and Mrs. Batchelor would come round to us, and Sam would come and fetch her when I was going to be at home and he hadn't been ordered for night work.

When he went away with his people to Torquay his wife wasn't very well, and the doctor said that

she had better not go as it would be too relaxing for her, she wanting bracing up. She didn't want to stop in the empty stables—which were in a mews —all by herself, and so Mr. Batchelor agreed she should go and stay up at Hampstead in a nice little cottage near the Heath, which belonged to a Mrs. Gibbs and her husband, a nice respectable couple who had been servants in good families before they were married late in life. Mrs. Gibbs herself had been lady's maid to a dear old maiden lady who was very wealthy, and her husband, Mr. Gibbs, had been butler. Quite an old-fashioned couple they were, but just the people—Mr. Batchelor thought—for his wife to stay with. They were not strangers to Mrs. Batchelor either, she having been parlourmaid for a short time with the same old maiden lady, but leaving to marry Mr. Batchelor, who was a smart young fellow, and second man to a millionaire baking-powder gentleman, who had a beautiful place at Hampstead, and died, leaving everything to his only son, who was a great traveller, and never at home. Everything was sold off, horses and carriages and all, and then Mr. Batchelor got a place as head man with the family who had the delicate daughter, and had left their town house and gone to Torquay for the benefit of her health.

Directly the doctor told Mr. Batchelor Torquay would be very bad for his wife, who wanted bracing, having been very weak and ailing for some time, he

thought of Hampstead, which stands high and which was, so to speak, his wife's native air, and he went over and saw Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs, and they agreed to let her lodge with them while her husband was away. He felt that he should be happier in his mind knowing that she was with Mrs. Gibbs, who knew her and would look after her if she wasn't very well—much happier than if he had left her in the mews, which was certainly not a healthy place at the best of times.

He went to Torquay, and Mrs. Batchelor went to the cottage on Hampstead Heath, and it was three months, I should say, before we saw anything of him again. But one evening we were sitting in the club about ten o'clock, having a heated argument, as the saying is, about politics, which is a thing, if I had my way, I'd make it a rule should never be discussed in any club where hard-working men meet together to rest from their labours and enjoy a social glass. It only leads to high words and often bad language, and I have known two decent respectable married men ready to fly at each other's throats because one said that Mr. Gladstone was the saviour of his country, and the other that he was ruining it at the rate of sixty miles an hour. And that is why at election time I give the club a wide berth, for I've come to the conclusion that if a man can't make up his mind which side he's going to take in politics without arguing himself into a fit of apoplexy over it he'd much better

leave politics to them as can. If I'm a Conservative, I'm not likely to turn Radical because a man opposite to me bangs the table with his fist and calls Lord Salisbury bad names; and if I'm a Radical, I'm not likely to turn Conservative because a young fellow with a stiff collar and an eye-glass drawls out that Gladstone ought to have been put in a lunatic asylum twenty years ago. I hear all and say nothing, and when I get my bit of paper and put my cross to it in the little wooden partition at the polling place, I vote for the man as I think is most likely to look after good old England and keep down the price of provisions.

But the night that we were having the heated argument it was about the Irish question, and it was getting nasty, because one of our fellows *was* an Irishman, and he was for fighting everybody there and then that dared to say a word against Home Rule, and just as he was calling our honoured chairman, Mr. Hutchins, a "word-which-I-will-not-lower-myself-by-repeating Saxon," and we were all shouting "Order, order!" at the top of our voices, in came Mr. Batchelor; and it was lucky he did, for none of us having seen him so long, and all liking him, there was a regular chorus of "Hallo, Sam!" and that turned the conversation, and the Irishman got up and went out swearing in his own native language all to himself to relieve his feelings. And we were all glad because, though we didn't relish being called "dirty"—only it wasn't "dirty"

—"Saxons," we all knew that Mr. O'Flannigan—that was his name, and he'd been in the Royal Artillery, and was coachman to young Sir Gilbert Yoxall, who had married a music-hall lady—wasn't at all a bad fellow when you knew him, though, as the comic song used to say, "You'd got to know him first."

After Mr. O'Flannigan had gone we dropped politics, and Sam Batchelor came across and sat in a chair near me, and as soon as I'd asked him what he'd have and ordered it, and he'd lighted his pipe, I asked him how he'd been getting on, and he told me "all right," and he'd only come back the day before, and of course his wife was back again at the mews, and wouldn't I and my wife come over the next evening to tea, as it was a long time since his wife had seen any of her old friends.

I said I would if I could, but anyway the missus should, and we didn't get a chance of saying much more to each other, for Mr. Hutchins—who'd been brooding, so to speak, over being called a vulgar-worded Saxon—got up quite unexpected, and holding his pipe with the stem upright, which was always his signal for silence, said, "Gentlemen, I've been thinking things over unbeknown to you, and I've come to this here conclusion. When a member of this club, which has always been a select assemblage of gentlemen in high-class families, gets up and calls your chairman by an insulting epitaph (he mixed up his words

wonderful did Mr. Hutchins when he spoke slow and solemn), it's a insult to your club, gentlemen, in its official capacity, and so I hope as you'll find somebody to take my place as is more used to being addressed in such language. Gentlemen, I thank you one and all for having honoured me as your chairman for a matter of twelve year come next Michaelmas, and I beg to resign the office." And with that Mr. Hutchins puts on his hat and gets into his overcoat as quick as his rheumatics would let him.

Of course, we weren't going to let the poor old chap go like that, knowing as it would break his heart, so we pushed him gently back into his big chair, and then we took it in turns one after the other to get up and make a speech, saying what a great respect we had for him, and them as couldn't speak gave a toast or a sentiment, and we had glasses round and drank "Our Chairman," and sang "For he's a jolly good fellow!" And it ended up by the dear old boy going home quite happy, and being glad of my arm as far as his stables, which were only a matter of five minutes' walk, but quite far enough for him that evening, he having drunk all our healths in hot spirits, never taking them cold, but with a glass crusher, a lump of sugar, and a bit of lemon peel.

I told the missus when I got home that we'd been asked to tea next day at the Batchelors, and she was glad, because she thought Mrs. Batchelor

a very nice, quiet, respectable young woman, and always neat and tidy and homely, and liked Sam's respectful way to me, he always treating me as one who had seen the world and held a good position, and, so to speak, a bit above him, but, of course, nothing cringing or buttering-up or anything but what was manly, because that wasn't Sam's character.

The next evening about six o'clock me and the missus went round, and very pleased Mrs. Batchelor was to see us, and had made their little sitting-room quite cosy, and gave us a capital cup of tea and dripping cakes, her own make, and a credit to any woman, which made my wife envious, for with all her good qualities she was no hand at the oven, which never comes if it isn't born in you, and, I have heard, depends a good deal on what part of the country a woman comes from.

After tea we sat and talked, and the ladies "my deared" each other as ladies will, and we let 'em have their heads for a bit, women always having such a lot to tell each other when they haven't met for a time, and me and Sam lit our pipes and only joined in promiscuous.

But after they'd talked themselves out Sam broke in all of a sudden, through hearing a dog bark in the next stables, and said, "Here, 'Liza, tell Mr. and Mrs. Wynterdyke about Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs and that pug dog." And then he turned to me and said, "Laugh—I thought I should have

died when the missus came home full of it and told me all about it. It's the rummiest story I've heard for many a long day."

Mrs. Batchelor laughed herself when Sam spoke about Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs and the dog, and she said it was very funny now, but when she was living at the cottage on Hampstead Heath that pug dog got on her nerves and she used to go to bed and dream about it.

"You see," she said, "the people I've been staying with are very old-fashioned, having lived with an old maiden lady, Miss Westmacott, so long. She was a very rich old lady, her father having been a banker or something of the sort, and she the only daughter. She had a beautiful house, but all very old-fashioned furniture, and lovely grounds, but didn't go out very much, being dreadfully nervous and always fancying she'd got whatever ailment was going about at the time and being mentioned in the newspapers; and she never went more than a few miles from home for five-and-twenty years, and then only in a closed carriage; and she'd never been in a railway train, having suffered even when a little girl from a dreadful nervousness that made her terrified of nearly everything.

"Mrs. Gibbs that is now was her maid for twenty years, and was engaged to Gibbs, who was the butler for over seven, Miss Westmacott not wishing them to get married while she was alive, but quite willing for them to be engaged.

"Miss Westmacott's great fancy was for dogs, and she had several, and they all lived in the house till they died, and then they were buried against the south wall in the front garden, so that the sun could shine on their graves, and little headstones with their names on were put up to every one of them. When she died she had only one left, and that was the two-year-old son of her favourite pug, who had died a few months before and been buried with the rest.

"She left by her will a very decent sum to her maid and her butler, and besides that she left it in her will that they were to have the cottage on the Heath which was her property, and a hundred pounds a year extra to look after her little dog Punch, and that money was only to be paid as long as he lived, which was sure to make him well looked after, and the solicitor who paid the money was to pay it once every month and always see the dog before he parted with it. When the dog died the money was to leave off, and the cottage was to go to the old lady's niece, who could let it, of course, to anybody she liked.

"The money that they had got in ready cash after the will was read Mr. Gibbs was persuaded, by a scamp of a fellow who had got hold of him, to put into a business; but it turned out a downright swindle, and twelve months afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs had only the cottage to live in and the hundred a year which they got for looking after

Punch, the pug, and about enough of their capital left that hadn't been invested in that business to bring them in a pound a week.

"When I went to stay with them I saw the pug fast asleep in a chair by the fire, and Mr. Gibbs sitting by it and brushing the flies off it and feeling its nose every now and then to see if it was cold, but I didn't think very much about it, because I was rather strange and upset at being separated from Sam, it being the first time since we were married.

"But when I got up the next morning and went downstairs, there was Mrs. Gibbs in hysterics, wringing her hands, and Mr. Gibbs flying down the garden path and out on to the Heath with one boot and one slipper on and no hat, like a madman.

"'Good gracious,' I said, 'whatever is it?' And Mrs. Gibbs left off wringing her hands and gasped out that Punch had got out and had run away and would be lost, and they were ruined, for the solicitor was coming that day, and they'd lose their hundred pounds and the cottage, and be turned out into the wide, wide world homeless and penniless.

"I said I hoped it wasn't so bad as that. Most likely the dog was somewhere about near at hand, and I'd go and help Mr. Gibbs to look for it.

"I put on my hat and went out. It was only about eight in the morning, and there was hardly anybody about on the Heath. I saw Mr. Gibbs

across by the big pond, and I went over to him, and there he was yelling and whistling and calling, and going almost mad; and Punch, the pug, was having a swim all to himself in the pond, and barking as much as to say, 'It's fine, and I'm having a good time!'

"When he saw he wouldn't come out Mr. Gibbs began to tremble like an aspen leaf, and he said, 'Oh, lor! oh, that I should live to see this day! Punch will have the cramp and be drowned; or, if he doesn't, he'll catch a cold on his lungs and die, and we'll be ruined!'

"Then without another word he kicked off his odd boot, and before I could stop him he was in the pond and wading about up to his middle and saying, 'Punchy, Punchy! come to dada!' and a lot of foolishness, and stretching out his hands and trying to catch the dog.

"The little imp of mischief would let him come up quite close, and then he would give a bark and swim across to the other side of the pond and Mr. Gibbs after him.

"And after the silly old man had been wading about up to his chest for nearly a quarter of an hour, Master Punch scrambled out and rolled himself on the grass, and then dashed off for a scamper after a great big St. Bernard that had come out for a morning stroll.

"Out of the pond came Mr. Gibbs, the water dripping off him, and looking like a drowned hip-

popotamus, for he was very fat and short-winded, and off he dashed after the two dogs, who were having a fine game to themselves. The big dog went off at a gallop towards a villa down the road, and after him went Master Punch, and Mr. Gibbs after them—a pretty spectacle, I can assure you.

"I was sorry for the man making such an exhibition of himself, but it was so ridiculous I couldn't help laughing, and I went after them to see what happened. I saw the two dogs go into a garden and up a gravel path into a house, and Mr. Gibbs, panting and leaving pools behind him, went in after them; and presently he came out of the villa with Punch in his arms, and the gentleman the house belonged to swearing at him dreadfully and asking him what the devil he meant by coming into an elegantly furnished morning-room and leaving pools of water on the carpet and making everything wet.

"And when Mr. Gibbs and the dog got back to the cottage Mrs. Gibbs had the dog in a warm bath in a minute, and then rolled it in blankets and rubbed it with embrocation, and gave it a teaspoonful of brandy, and sent for the veterinary surgeon, but took no notice of poor Mr. Gibbs, who had to stand in his dripping wet clothes helping with the dog. And he had a most dreadful cold afterwards, and sneezed and coughed for a fortnight.

"That dog was the master of the place, and no

baby born to a throne was ever made more fuss with. If he only so much as whined, he was laid on his little fat back and rubbed by both of them, and his food was all of the best, and Mr. Gibbs had to taste the milk and the food brought for him to see if it was fresh and good, and in the middle of the night they would get up and hot baby's food for it, and when I said I thought it was carrying things too far they said, 'Oh, but Punch is our living! If anything happens to Punch we lose everything we have?' Which was quite true, but it didn't make it any the less ridiculous.

"If Mr. Gibbs was in the easy chair having his forty winks, and the dog wanted the chair, Mrs. Gibbs would wake him up and say, 'My dear, Punch wants the chair!' and he would get up. And they would both of them go down on their hands and knees every day and pick up all the fluff and the pins and anything that was on the carpet for fear Punch should pick them up and swallow them.

"And they never went out together because Punch couldn't be left alone or trusted to anyone else for fear of anything happening.

"One day Punch had picked up something in the garden that hadn't agreed with him. I expect it was only grass he'd been eating, but he was sick. Mrs. Gibbs she got the dog up in her lap and tried to make it drink mustard and water, which of course

it wouldn't, saying it had been poisoned, and Mr. Gibbs rushed off for the veterinary, Mrs. Gibbs calling after him to say the doctor was to bring the stomach pump and leeches, and I don't know what, and when the doctor came it was nothing at all.

"But till he did come Mrs. Gibbs was going on and sobbing, and really you would have thought it was a human being that was in danger of its life, and not a dog that had eaten grass. I tried to make her calmer, but it was all no use, and when the doctor came and said it was all right she went flop down, fainting with the anxiety and overwrought nerves."

"Oh," said my wife when Mrs. Batchelor stopped for a minute, "how ridiculous! I love dogs, but to make a fuss of one like that is too absurd."

"Yes," said Sam; "I wouldn't like to live in that cottage with Master Punch—I should wish him at Jericho. The best thing they could do would be to insure his life for a thousand, and let the little beggar enjoy himself, and have a bit of peace and quietness themselves."

I didn't say anything, but I thought that the old maid who'd left that legacy to ensure her dog being looked after knew what she was about, only if it had been five hundred a year I'd have let somebody else have it rather than have my nose put out of joint by an impudent little pug, and my wife giving him a hot bath and wrapping him in blankets

because he'd had a swim, while I was standing wet to the skin through going in after him, and left to catch my death without so much as a dry shirt being put to the fire for me.

* * * * * *

We spent a pleasant evening with Mr. and Mrs. Batchelor, and left about ten and went home. When we'd got in my wife was quite chirpy, and after she'd gone in and seen the children were all asleep and comfortable she came back, and I got the *Evening News* that had been pushed under the door and read her over all the smart little paragraphs and all the little bits of gossip that the women like, and she said she wished I'd always be at home of an evening like that, and read to her after the children had been put to bed.

Bless her little heart! she means well, but women will never understand that a man who's always at home and never goes out and meets his fellow creatures, or spends a social evening at his club, gets rusty, and isn't up to date, as the saying is. I wonder what there'd be in the newspapers if the gentlemen who write all those smart paragraphs, and stories, and politics, and society, and gossip of the day stopped at home of an evening to read to their wives instead of going to *their* clubs.

VIII.—TRA-LA-LA-LA !

WE were sitting in the Club one night and we heard a newspaper man go by shouting out, "Extra Special—List of the Killed and Wounded," and the waiter happening to be in the room we sent him out to get a paper, for there'd just been a tremendous amount of excitement through a lot of young Englishmen having been fighting with the Boers in South Africa, and the news had come early in the afternoon that our fellows (being only a handful against a regular army of those Dutch beggars hiding behind rocks and picking them off, being first-rate marksmen) had been killed. There had been special editions coming out ever since, because when the evening papers get hold of anything of that sort you may be sure they'll make as many editions of it as they can; but the list of who was killed and who was wounded hadn't come to hand.

When we heard the man shouting out "List of killed and wounded," we were all eager to see it, because there were no end of younger sons and relatives of the first families out in South Africa, and so we felt a personal interest like in the affair.

And there was one of our chaps more anxious

than any of us, a young fellow who was now groom to the Hon. Lionel Morphew of the Guards, but had been before that with a young gentleman named Vivian, who was known when he was running through his money and making things hum, as the saying is, as "Tra-la-la-la!"

I think the young gentlemen at the Pelican Club gave him that name first, but at any rate it got about and stuck to him, and Mr. Martin—that was the young fellow who had been his man in the days when he was cutting a dash—told us that nearly all the young fellows he met and some of the young ladies would always speak to him that way, saying, "Hulloh, Tra-la-la-la. How are you, old fellow?" and that sort of thing.

It "knocked him," as the vulgar saying is, the first time he heard his young governor spoken to that way, not having been with him then very long; but he heard afterwards how it came about, and it seems that young Mr. Vivian used to go very often to a West End theatre—the Gaiety, I believe it was—where there was a celebrated low comedian who was very funny and full of droll sayings, and in one piece whatever happened to him (it was a piece with music) he used to say, "Well, what does it matter?—Tra-la-la-la!"

It tickled Mr. Vivian so much that he got it into his head, and always after that would bring it into his own conversation. For instance, if he went racing and laid seven hundred to four hun-

dred on the favourite and it went down he would shrug his shoulders and say, "Well, what does it matter?—Tra-la-la-la!" Or if some decent fellows who saw him going to the dogs and his good nature being imposed upon right and left said to him, as they would sometimes, "Look here, Jack, old fellow—you're making a fool of yourself. If you go on like this you'll be stony broke in a couple of years," he would smile a sad sort of a smile and say, "Well, what does it matter?—Tra-la-la-la!"

And when the end came, as everybody knew it must, and he'd run through everything and made a dreadful ruin of his life through a foolish marriage, and suddenly disappeared, and, it leaked out afterwards, had gone to South Africa with only a few pounds over and above his fare in his pocket, everybody was sorry, but what they said was, "Poor old Tra-la-la-la!"

It was when the first news came of there being trouble in South Africa that Bob Martin told us the story, and what he had heard afterwards, the Hon. Mr. Morphew—Bob's present master—having been Mr. Vivian's best friend, and for that reason had known all about what a good servant Bob was, and had taken him on when the horses were all sold off and Mr. Vivian's establishment broken up for the benefit of his creditors, who were mostly jewellers and money-lenders.

The Hon. Mr. Morphew would meet young

fellows who had known Mr. Vivian, and they would talk about him, and Martin, often being present, would hear everything.

One day he heard Mr. Morphew say that a friend of his, who had been out to South Africa for a holiday, had met poor old Tra-la-la-la just as bright and cheery as ever, but awfully low down in the world, having had great difficulty in getting anything to do, being only a gentleman, with no knowledge of how to earn his own living. He had asked Mr. Morphew's friend a lot of questions about the old set, and sent his love to "the boys," as he called them. Mr. Morphew's friend was, it seems, very sorry to see the fine young fellow in such low water, and really without a friend in the world, and when he found out by chance that he was so hard up that he'd actually had to earn enough to get food by doing almost menial work, he said, "Poor old chap—I'm awfully sorry you've been so hard hit as this!" and Mr. Vivian looked down at the pavement for a minute and his lip quivered as he put his hands into his empty pockets; but he pulled himself together with a big effort, and, half crying, half laughing, he said, "Well, what does it matter?—Tra-la-la-la!"

There must be lots of gentlemen and lots of sportsmen, and lots of men who were neither, but mixed with both, who will recognise Tra-la-la-la, and I daresay they will understand what the Hon. Mr. Morphew meant when he said that the

saddest thing he had ever seen was to watch this bright young fellow coming night after night among the old set and carrying things off with a laugh and a joke, when they all could see that his dress suit was getting shabbier and shabbier every evening.

That is the most unmistakable sign of a real gentleman being broke, as the saying is. It means the end is coming very fast, when a fashionable young gentleman begins to show signs of wear about his evening dress. There is a whole romance to be written round the shabby dress suit, but of course I am not clever enough to do that. But I quite understand what Mr. Morphew meant when Bob Martin repeated his words to me.

He told us the whole story through seeing his young Governor's name among the list of the young Englishmen who had volunteered, and joined a corps of the Mounted Police, or something of that sort, when the trouble between those Dutch fellows and the English people began.

And this, as far as I can recollect now, is how he told it:—

"When I went into Mr. Vivian's service," said Bob Martin, "he was a young fellow of about twenty-two, and he'd just come into a lot of money from a rich uncle who, it seems, was a great man somewhere and owned copper-mines. Mr. Vivian before that had been kept very strict by his father, who was a very rich man himself, but

very fond of money, and one of those stern religious men who think everything except making money and going to church is sinful.

"He was very angry it seems when his son was left all this money, because he thought he ought to have got something too, and he didn't, the brothers having quarrelled late in life over something that happened, which the uncle—that was the copper-mine owner—had done when he was staying at his brother's house in London. It was something the uncle did on Sunday which horrified Mr. Vivian, and he told his brother it was an 'abomination,' and he refused to countenance such conduct from anyone, no matter who it was, while they were under his roof. The uncle, who was a fine good-hearted fellow, and not a bit strait-laced, was dumbfounded, as the saying is, at being talked to like that, and he let out pretty straight from the shoulder in his language, and there were high words on both sides. Mr. Vivian, the uncle, went down the steps of his brother's house that afternoon almost in an apoplectic fit with rage, and shook his fist at his brother, who was looking at him over the flower-boxes in the front window. He swore that until he apologised for his rudeness to him he would never speak or write to him again.

"The religious Mr. Vivian never apologised, and so they never met again; but when the uncle died he left something like a hundred thousand pounds

to his nephew, whom he had always liked and didn't want to wrong because he had quarrelled with the lad's father.

"It was after young Mr. Vivian had come into his fortune," said Mr. Martin, "that I went to him to be groom. He had a smart lot; a mail phæton and a pair that he gave a thousand guineas for, and a splendid pony for his polo cart, and a good high-stepper for his gig, that used to make everybody in the Park turn round and envy him. If I had wanted to 'make' out of him I could, for he never took any account of money, but left the stables to me, and I had what lads I wanted under me, and just paid what I liked for everything; but I'm proud to say I never cheated him of a penny, and wouldn't have done, for my mother had been his nurse when he was a child, my father having died and she having to go out to service again; and to the end of her days, after she had been pensioned off, he was always 'her boy,' and thought a lot of her when she called at the house to see him. It was through that that I got the place directly—in fact, young Mr. Vivian sent for me from the country, where I was, and said to me, 'Bob, I'm setting up on my own, and I want you to be my head man.'

"And knowing what my mother who was dead and gone thought of him, I wasn't going to use him badly. I'd as soon have tried to rob my own brother,

"He was always good to me, and I was in his confidence from the first, he having known me from a child, and he used to talk to me just as if I was one of the family. Often, too, he would tell me things that worried him that he wouldn't tell anybody else. Of course I couldn't say anything to him about the way he was flinging his money about and the set he had got into, racing and card-playing, because it wasn't my place to do that—and for the matter of that, when I heard he'd got a hundred thousand pounds it seemed to me as if one could afford to be extravagant and go the pace on that.

"But I used to get a bit uneasy at times, especially when he'd drive to a race meeting, and after I had seen to the horses being stabled I would come back into the carriage enclosure and hear the remarks that were made by people "in the know" as to the way he was plunging, and the swells and the rooks who were making a big picking out of him.

"It isn't the common sharps who get the most out of the young fellows who come into a lot of money. There are men, and some of them received in the best society, who are born gentlemen with handles to their names, who are a good deal more dangerous companions to a young fellow with money than the professional sharps are. It's your Sir Thingummy This and your Captain That and your Lord the Other, who have run through

their own money if they ever had any, who get the best part of the fortunes that young plungers are supposed to lose at cards and on the turf.

"His father, Mr. Vivian, was mad with rage at the way his son was going on, and directly he took to racing and leading a fast life, as the saying is, he came to his son's chambers and made a scene, and when his son said, 'What does it matter? Tra-la-la-la!' he cast him off for ever, saying he would come to beg his bread in the streets, but if he were starving he should never darken his doors again, and he disowned him from that day forth, et cetera.

"Of course, it didn't so much matter to the young governor while he'd got plenty and was having a good time, but there came a day when his father might have saved him and didn't.

"There was a young woman—a very beautiful young woman she was—who was what is called, I believe, 'a show girl' at one of the theatres, and my young governor fell over head and ears in love with her, and one day he came and took my breath away by saying, 'Bob, I'm going to be married,' and he gave me the order to put the brougham horses to, and I drove him to a Registry Office close up by St. Pancras Workhouse, and he went in, and about ten minutes afterwards out he came with a tall, fine young woman, with her veil down, and they got into the brougham together and I drove them to the Charing Cross Hotel where it seems they had their wedding breakfast,

and went to Dover on their way to Paris for their honeymoon.

"I saw who my new young mistress was in a minute, having had her pointed out to me often at the theatre, and I said to myself, 'Here's a pretty kettle of fish! I wonder what Mr. Vivian, senior, will say when he hears of this!'

"While they were away on their honeymoon it got into the papers that the beautiful and accomplished Miss Baby Brabazon—she was nearly six feet—had been led to the hymeneal altar by Mr. 'Jack' Vivian, eldest son of Mr. Vivian, J.P., of Berkeley Square, and when some of the young gentlemen that my governor knew heard of it they said, 'Oh lor! who'd have thought poor old Tra-la-la-la would have made such a fool of himself!'

"When they came back it was a grand flat that Mr. Vivian had taken, and they seemed all right and happy, though certainly I couldn't say she was quite a lady, but nothing was too good for her, and she had everything that a princess could want.

"Of course she wanted female servants about her and a maid, and so she said she must have a housekeeper, and an old lady came that she recommended, but I very soon saw she was no housekeeper. But she had a fine salary and her own rooms and lived on the fat of the land, and was always very friendly with the missus, who

would often take her out in the carriage when Mr. Vivian was away.

"But certainly it was not a wise thing to be so friendly, for the old lady took advantage of it and gave herself airs, and it soon got about among the servants that she had a dreadful habit of taking too much, and when she was like that she carried on anyhow.

"It got so bad that one day master and missus having had a few words about her, she having insulted him, he ordered her to pack up her boxes and go, and then the truth came out. She said she would *not* go, because *she wasn't going to be parted from her child.*

"The young governor he gave a great gasp at that, as well he might, and missus came in and he turned on her and said, 'Is this person your mother?' and she said, as bold as brass, 'Yes—if you must know—she is.'

"It was a dreadful knock down for the young governor, because, of course, though his wife couldn't help having a mother like that, she ought to have told him, and not got her into the flat in that underhand way. It made him begin to think he might be deceived other ways, and he felt he had been badly treated. After that he and the young missus never got on so well together, and she saw that he'd married in haste and was repenting at leisure, as the old proverb says, and she turned nasty and made things uncomfortable at the flat.

"I think it was that that made him get more reckless and more extravagant than ever. When he had married her he had settled a sum of money on her in cash, which would bring her in about four hundred a year, and it was a good job he did in one way, for when the smash came and he was sold up and everything went, that was all right for her.

"They were separated before then, she being mad with him for being short of money and not able to gratify her extravagances, and she marched off with all her jewellery and her four hundred a year, and left him to do the best he could. And as his father wouldn't have anything to do with him, and he was too proud to go and ask to be forgiven, he went out to South Africa and knew what it was to be homeless and hungry till he got something that brought him enough to keep body and soul together, and then, when the fighting began, he volunteered and became a mounted something or other."

That was the story Bob Martin told us of his young governor, and when we sent out that evening and bought the list of the killed and wounded he was in all our minds. Bob, he took the paper from the waiter when he brought it in, and opened it and turned to the list of the killed first, and, when he finished it, he said, "Thank God!" and we knew Mr. Vivian wasn't in it. But he took up the paper again and looked at the wounded, and we saw his face change. "It's nearly as bad," he said, and I

took the paper and there it was, "Trooper J. Vivian, dangerously wounded." Bob Martin didn't say anything, but he just nodded to us, as much as to say, "You understand—good night," and went out.

* * * * * *

It was six weeks before I saw Bob Martin again, and I knew that the worst had happened to poor young Mr. Vivian, because his death had been in all the papers the next day, he having died of his wounds a few hours after the fight was over.

When I saw Bob he looked very miserable and downhearted, and there was no doubt it had been a great blow to him. His eyes were quite moist, and there was a tremble in his voice when he told me what he had heard from his governor, the young Guardsman, who had a letter from a friend who was in the battle and was with the poor young fellow when he died.

It seems he had fought like a lion and cheered all the others up with his gay spirits, and was just saying, "I'm just beginning to think life's worth living again," when he was shot down almost as the last word left his lips.

Mr. Morphew's friend was fighting by him and was captured with the rest, but only being hit himself in the arm, was put with the wounded prisoners, and he was with Mr. Vivian to the end.

"Poor old Tra-la-la-la!" he wrote to Mr. Morphew. "I couldn't help thinking as I saw

him lying there, his life ebbing fast away, of the old days when he was the brightest and merriest of all our set in town, and it only seemed such a short time ago too. It was about five o'clock in the morning that he died. He hadn't said a word for hours, seeming to be unconscious, but just before the end he opened his eyes and moved, and I was by his side in a moment. I think his mind was wandering, and he thought he was back again among us. He knew me, for he murmured, 'Good old Bertie!' Then he seemed to be thinking. A minute after I saw his lips move, and I bent down and heard him whisper, 'What does it matter? Tra-la——' He stopped suddenly and gave a great shiver and raised himself in the bed. Then he fell back in my arms—dead."

We both of us sat quiet after Bob Martin had finished, and we were both thinking the same thing how sad it was that this poor young fellow, who had once had everything to make him bright and happy, and might have lived a long and honourable life, should have died so young, and so broken down, and so far away. And I have seen so much of it among the young fellows of the day. I often wonder what they must think when they have squandered everything in a few short years of thoughtless pleasure—if you can call it pleasure—and look back in their dark hours on all that they have lost, and think how different their lives might have been.

And it's some of the best and bravest that come to grief the soonest. And their misfortune—or punishment, perhaps, it ought to be called—is harder for them to bear because they are so really good at heart if only they had had good influences instead of bad about them. They don't stop at home and cadge and whine, these fine young English gentlemen—they are too proud for that—they go out far away, where nobody knows them, and wait till death comes as a merciful release, and when I think of them I always think of the lines that Indian gentleman who writes about soldiers so splendidly wrote about the Gentleman Rankers:—

We have done with Hope and Honour, we are lost to Love and Truth,
  We are dropping down the ladder rung by rung,
And the measure of our torment is the measure of our youth.
  God help us, for we knew the worst too young!
Our shame is clean repentance for the crime that brought the sentence,
  Our pride it is to know no spur of pride,
And the curse of Reuben holds us till an alien turf enfolds us
  And we die, and none can tell Them where we died.

* * * * * *

Long after Bob Martin had told me the story of his poor young Governor I was at Sandown Park Races, and in the carriage enclosure I saw a handsome young woman on the top of a drag with a lot of young swells round her, and she was laughing away and showing her white teeth, and sending first one and then the other to put ten pounds on this and ten pounds on that for her. I asked who she was, seeing that a good many people looked at

her and evidently knew her, and the man I asked said, "Oh, don't you know? That's Baby Brabazon—she's one of the Tableaux Vivants that the County Council's been making such a fuss about."

I looked at the young woman hard for a minute, and then I turned away and thought of the poor young gentleman lying in his lonely grave far away, and somehow or other the words came to my lips that I had heard, and I said to myself what the young fellows who knew him used to say,

"Poor old Tra-la-la-la!"

IX.—A PIOUS FRAUD.

I'D been reading a story in a weekly paper one Sunday morning, and it struck me as such a strange and interesting one that after we'd had dinner and the things were cleared away, and I and the missus were having a quiet half hour, the children having gone to Sunday School—which must often be a blessing to a man and his wife who want a little peace and quietness—I said to her, "You ought to read that story in the paper to-day, my dear—it's wonderful." Now my wife, good little soul as she is, and the best a man could ever have—God bless her!—isn't what you'd call quick and smart like some young women are at the present day, knowing and understanding everything, and a good deal more than's good for them perhaps.

Being country bred and brought up old-fashioned and to work and make herself useful in a house, she'd never had much time for filling her head with penny novelettes and that sort of thing, or for any reading at all except the Cottage Library sort, which her father had one or two of about the place, and some old magazines such as you used to find in country inns and farmhouses when I was a boy. So she'd never took to the new sort of reading

kindly, saying it was too deep for her. She was quite satisfied with a nice short love story that hadn't any long words in it, and ended happy and didn't take you rampaging half over Europe and get you mixed up with a couple of dozen different characters.

So when I said she ought to read the story because it was so strange and made you think, she said, "No, John, I've got a bit of a headache now, and I don't want to make it worse."

"But this is a really wonderful story," I said.

"Yes," said she, "I dare say. A great deal too wonderful for me—you know how silly I am, dear."

I laughed and said she certainly wasn't what I should call quick at getting hold of a story, she having often told me that she could read the same book over and over again, if she liked it, because it all went out of her head directly she laid the book down. But this story I wanted her to read wasn't *too* wonderful, I told her; and as to that, the things that happen in real life every day all round us were a good deal more wonderful than anything that paid storytellers made up out of their own heads.

She said, "Oh, nonsense, John! You don't mean to tell me that dukes and duchesses and detectives and squires and beautiful young women and female fiends carry on in respectable neighbourhoods like they do in the novelettes that Mrs. Wilson's

daughter opposite spends half her time reading, the lazy young hussy, instead of looking after the house and the children, as she ought to, and her mother such an invalid, too, poor thing!"

I said that I didn't know anything about beautiful fiends, not having much chance of meeting them, but that there wasn't a novel or romance written—not even "Monte Cristo," or "Lady Audley's Secret," or "East Lynne"—that couldn't find something in real life that could beat it with a stone in hand.

She *didn't* read the story, but compromised the matter, as the lawyers say, by telling me that I could read it aloud to her. That settled it, because "Once bitten, twice shy," and I knew what would happen. She'd shut her eyes to listen, that being a habit of hers from always doing it at home at prayers and when her father, who was brought up pious, read the Bible aloud on Sundays. And whenever she shut her eyes to listen to me, especially of a Sunday afternoon, she was always in a comfortable state of forty winks before I'd got halfway through, which I said to her one day perhaps also was a habit of hers when she shut her eyes to listen to her father when he read the Sunday afternoon chapters, though I don't think it could have been, because when I was courting I was one of the family now and then on those occasions, and the old gentleman read out loud in a voice, through having asthma, that would have kept a wagoner

awake on his cart coming back along a country road empty from Covent Garden Market. And that's a hard job, as you know if you've been driving and met one in a narrow part, and had to shout at him to wake up and pull his horses on one side for you to pass, and many's the crack of the whip I've had to try when they were too far gone for shouting to do it. But I never hit 'em hard, knowing that plenty of 'em never have their clothes off for a whole week together, and no wonder they often drop off and have the wheels over 'em.

I didn't press the matter, as the Q.C.'s say in the Law Courts, when arguing with the learned judge about what they may get out of a witness and what they mayn't, according to the rules of the game, so to speak, which the judge is a sort of referee sitting to see played fair, though there's no free kick given for a foul—which is a figure of speech I've learnt through the football editions of the evening papers.

But what I'd said to my wife about real life being a good deal more wonderful than the tales made up by those who write them for a livelihood came back to me on Monday evening, when I looked into the club for an hour. The missus had gone to a Post Office Orphanage Concert at St. James's Hall with two tickets the governor had given me—he always taking a pound's worth of the postman every year —the missus being fond of music, which I'm sorry to say I'm not, except it's a good old tune you can

jig your feet to or a good old song as you can join in the chorus.

It was about nine o'clock when I dropped in to the club, and there were very few members present, it being in the season, and so most of 'em on duty, but there was a man there that I hadn't seen before, not in the club, but had known years ago when I was on the coach with poor old Jim Dolby, and I hadn't seen since I left off being guard and went into private service. It was "Old Times" with us directly, and plenty to say to each other and ask each other about old friends, and presently the other members dropping out one by one, having to go on late night work or something of that sort, we had the room to ourselves. And one thing leading to another, he told me the story that made me think of what I'd said to the missus.

He'd been living with a family in the country who lived in a lovely old-fashioned house called The Grange, that had been theirs for centuries, and none more respected in the county, the Lalehams having always been friends to the poor and beloved by everybody. But the Lalehams that my friend had been coachman to had come to The Grange on the death of the old Squire, and had come comparative strangers because the new owner, the Squire's son, had been away in India ever since he was a young man, and had not come home when he came to England, having quarrelled with the old gentle-

man, who, being a widower, had married his housekeeper, who was a young woman compared to himself. Colonel Laleham never forgave his father that, and so the villagers and county people saw nothing of him. They only knew that he had married an English lady in India, and that when his time was up there he had come back with her and his son and made his home in another part of England, living very quietly, his wife being an invalid.

When Colonel Laleham and his wife came to The Grange at the old man's death, the Colonel was sixty, and his wife was only a year or two younger. The Colonel was nearly forty when he married, and his son, who did not come with them to The Grange, being, it was understood, abroad, was about twenty. Mrs. Laleham was a beautiful lady with quite grey hair, and looked, through the pain that she always suffered with her ill-health, quite old, and it was feared she was going blind. She was, my friend told me, the gentlest and sweetest lady he had ever met, and the Colonel waited on her hand and foot, and was as tender and loving with her as though they were still sweethearts.

They brought some of their own servants with them, one being Mrs. Deborah, as she was called, a dear old lady who had been their son's (Mr. Harry Laleham's) nurse, and had stayed with the family ever since, being devoted to them and they

to her, and her and Mrs. Laleham loving him one as much as the other.

Mr. Broome—Humphrey Broome—that was the name of my friend who told me the story of the Lalehams—was taken on by the Colonel, having been coachman to the old gentleman for two years before his death, when he had become really childish, having been quite broken down by the sudden death of his wife, which had happened while she was coming back from London, where she had been to visit some relatives, he being too old to travel with her. She was found dead in the railway carriage as she was coming back home, and her dead body was carried up the avenue to The Grange just as the old gentleman was expecting her back. He never said or did anything that was really sensible afterwards, his brain going from the shock.

Once they asked him if he would see his son, but he said no, and seemed so excited they never asked him again, and so the Colonel never came until all was over and he took possession.

It was the year after the Colonel had married in India that his father married the woman who had come as housekeeper to The Grange, nobody knew from where, but most people thought from London, where perhaps the old gentleman met her first, as he was often in town in those days. There was no doubt he was very fond of her, and they lived happy together, though often she would appear to

people who saw her to be sad and to have something on her mind. She having been his housekeeper, none of the people about took to her, thinking she had entangled the old gentleman to make a fool of himself, and so The Grange during her lifetime saw no company, and she must have been very dull but for her going now and then to London for a week or two by herself.

The Colonel and his wife came after all those years almost as strangers to The Grange, but were soon liked and taken to, and gradually the scandal —as the old gentleman's marriage was called—was forgotten, and everything went on in its old sleepy way in the village. But servants will talk to each other, and so Mr. Broome soon learned that his new master and mistress had their trouble too.

Mr. Harry Laleham, their only son, had caused their hearts to ache by his conduct, having, though a bright, clever, handsome young fellow, turned out rather wild. His mother idolised him, and would not hear a word against him, but the Colonel, though a good father and wrapt up in his son, did not attempt to deceive himself about the young fellow, and when, after one of his scrapes, he came to him to pay a large sum of money to get him out of trouble, paid it, but insisted he should no longer lead an idle, extravagant, useless life, and sent him out to a relative of his mother, to a place in India which was very healthy, but a quiet place and no temptation. And it

was where he would have plenty of outdoor work, and men to look after, and be always with his uncle and aunt, who had a tea plantation or something of that sort there.

He seems to have done pretty well there—at any rate, his uncle and aunt wrote home accounts that cheered his mother and father up, and then the Colonel, seeing how his wife was pining for her boy, declared that he should come home and live at The Grange with them. So the letter was sent and all was arranged, and they knew the day he would leave India and the day he would be home, and they counted all the days between, for Mrs. Laleham was getting seriously ill, and began to fear that she might not see her boy again. The doctor said that it was a good thing he was coming home, for the joy of having him with her again might be the turning-point in her illness, and she might get over it, but if she was worried or had any great shock it would kill her.

The telegram that came to say Mr. Harry had left his uncle's and was coming by the ship that left on such a date was taken to the poor lady as she lay propped up with pillows, but she could not read it, and her husband read it to her and bent over and kissed her and said, "Thank God, my darling, our boy will soon be here, and you will be better then."

"Yes, dear," she said, with tears of joy in her dim eyes—for she was losing her sight, being now

scarcely able to see—" I shall be better then." She knew that her eyesight was going fast, and that is why she was in such a hurry for her boy to come. She wanted to *see* him the last thing before her sight went out for ever.

Poor lady! When the terrible news came, soon after, everybody's first thought was for her. Mrs. Deborah, when she knew it, wailed out, "My boy! —my boy!—oh, his poor mother!" and fell down in a swoon, and the Colonel bending over her picked her up in his arms and said, "Deborah! Deborah! For God's sake! tell me—what can we do? what can we do? She must never know. It would kill her!"

It was a shocking thing that had happened. The news came by telegram. Mr. Harry Laleham had died the day before he was to go on board the ship. Afterwards we knew that he had broken out again, finding himself in a big town and going home and having money on him, and in that condition had met with a fatal accident, being thrown from a trap and his neck broken.

Old Mrs. Deborah and the Colonel were together for an hour in the library, and when they came out their faces were like death and their eyes quite red. The Colonel called all the servants together, and it was a scene that words cannot describe, when, his voice quivering, and the tears running down his cheeks, he told them all the news they were sure to find out sooner or later and begged

them on no account to let a word of the truth reach their poor mistress's ears as it would kill her. "And we all promised," said Mr. Broome, "and tried to tell our master how sorry we were for him, but the words wouldn't come, and we turned away as men and women turn from the graveside after all is over.

"We wondered how it could be kept from the poor lady who was expecting her boy, but of course we didn't know the plan that the Colonel had in his head till afterwards.

"It seems he told his wife very gently that Harry had missed that ship but would catch the next, and it would only be a few days longer for her to wait. She didn't say anything to him, but after he was gone she put her poor head on Mrs. Deborah's breast and sobbed out that she would never see him now, for her eyesight was failing fast.

"A week after that she was quite blind. When the doctor told the Colonel, Mary, the parlour-maid, who was in the room, heard the Colonel say with a deep sigh, 'Thank God!' and we wondered when she told us what he could mean, but we knew afterwards.

"The next day he told his wife he was going to London and he would wait till Harry came and bring him back with him. Then he called us all together and said, 'My good kind friends—for you have been my friends, all of you, in this terrible

affliction—I want you to help me all you can. I am going to bring someone here—I hope my poor wife will believe he is her son. Pray God she may! If she does you must all treat him as though he were your young master—you must help me in this deception. The doctor says that with the greatest care she cannot live long. Help me to make the short time she will be with me happy!'

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"A few days afterwards the Colonel came back. A telegram had come from him saying Master Harry had arrived, and Mrs. Deborah was with the poor mother who was eagerly waiting to clasp the boy she had not kissed for five long years in her loving arms.

"He was a good-looking, gentlemanly young fellow, this new Master Harry, but pale and sad-looking, and he seemed terribly nervous, as well he might be, at the part he had to play. It seems that the Colonel knew him, having met him in London at his lawyer's on business, and we were told afterwards had been struck not only by the likeness to his son, which, of course, would not have deceived his mother if she could have seen his face, but by his voice, which was so exact that when the Colonel heard it for the first time it gave him a great shock, it was so like.

"And it was remembering that that had put the idea of this deception in his mind, after he had talked things over with Mrs. Deborah.

"We all dreaded that meeting you may be sure, for our hearts were all with our dear mistress and the heart-broken father. Mrs. Deborah told us about it when it was all over.

"The Colonel led the young man into the sick room and to the bedside of the poor blind mother. The young fellow gave a great sob, for it had tried him terribly, as well it might, and said 'Mother!' and Harry's mother put out her arms, and then as he bent down she kissed him again and again, and sobbed out her thanks to God who had given her darling back to her.

"And Mrs. Deborah stood by with trembling lips, playing her part by saying how well Master Harry was looking, and laying her hand on his head and saying, 'Oh, Master Harry! Master Harry! you must never leave us again!'

"And the Colonel, hardly trusting himself, stood by the fireplace watching the scene with the doctor, until his wife put out her hand and felt in the empty space and said, 'Where are you, dear?' and he went towards the bed, and she laid the young man's hand in his and pressed them together, and then he knelt down, and they were both kneeling together by the bedside while she lifted her sightless eyes to Heaven, and thanked God that they were brought together never to be parted in life again.

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"The change for the better that the doctor had

hoped for never took place. The poor lady never rallied, and two months afterwards she passed away, but the last days of her life were made happy by the presence of the boy she loved better than her life. The poor young fellow behaved nobly, and we all loved him for his devotion to the 'mother' he had never seen before. When our mistress died she was holding his hand in hers, and her husband's lay gently on them both. When it was all over, and that gentle spirit had passed away for ever, the Colonel, his eyes streaming, turned to the young man and grasped his hand and said, 'God bless you for what you have done—my brother!'

"And from that hour to the day of the Colonel's death—for he didn't survive the loss of his wife and son long—those two were always together, and when the Colonel died everything was left to the young gentleman, only The Grange was to be Mrs. Deborah's home as long as she lived, and the young gentleman was to take the name of Laleham with the property.

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"We only knew afterwards what it all meant, and then the resemblance and the voice and the Colonel's plan were all as clear as noonday to us. The Colonel discovered the truth from his father's will. Before he had married the young woman in London she had borne him a son. When the boy was a year old he was put out to her friends in

London to be brought up, and the mother went to be the old gentleman's housekeeper. He was only a little over sixty then, and he married her.

"She always thought that he would consent to her having her boy at The Grange, but he feared the scandal, as of course people knew when they were married, and the boy was his living image, and the truth would come out. So he put her off with promises and let her go and see the boy from time to time, and had him brought up in London by some relatives of hers, and educated and sent to college, and made him a good allowance, but would never let him be acknowledged as his son or come to The Grange to see his mother. It was after going to see her son that the poor woman died so suddenly.

"The Colonel found his father's will had left an income to 'my son Richard, born before my marriage with Harriet Finch,' and he went to the lawyer about it and saw the young fellow there by appointment.

"And that was why he thought of the plan to make his wife's last hours happy, and never let her discover her boy was dead. That was why, when the doctor told him she was blind, he said, 'Thank God!' and that was why, when his wife lay dead with a loving smile upon her face, he turned to the young fellow and clasped his hand and said, 'God bless you—my brother!'"

X.—A STABLE BOY.

I'D said one night at the club that I had room in the stables for a smart young fellow, and Tom Blanchflower, who was head man to Sir Trevor D'Arcy, a most eccentric old gentleman who was always having odd ideas and doing queer things —which perhaps some day I may have an opportunity of telling you about—said he thought he knew of one to suit me, and would send him round the next day.

The next afternoon the young fellow came with a note from Tom, and after I'd looked him over and asked him a question or two, I thought he would suit, and I agreed to take him on. He was a tall, gentlemanly-looking lad, and did his work well, and I hadn't any reason to complain of him, but I soon found that the other lads in the stable didn't like him. It wasn't that he was disagreeable or anything of that sort, but he didn't "pal in" with them, as the saying is, spending his evenings poring over books—not novels or tales, but school books, history and poetry, and such like.

I'd noticed that he spoke differently to ordinary stable hands, and that when he wrote down his last address and the name of his employer he wrote it quickly and in a good bold hand, and so when I

heard he was always reading school books I made up my mind he was a young fellow who wanted to get on and was educating himself.

It was no business of mine what my men did in their own time so long as they didn't neglect their work, so I heard what my chaps had to say, and cautioned them not to get playing any of their tricks or irritating the new hand because he didn't go to public-houses with them or play cards or back horses. Then I went to the young chap and said, "Steve"—his name was Stephen Wilmot—"I've no complaint to make against you, I like the way you do your work, and if the place suits you I dare say you'll be able before long to improve your position here. But I want to give you a word of friendly advice. Don't be too stand-offish with your stable mates—it only leads to a lot of bad blood, and I want all my lads to get on well together—it's better for the work and better for everybody."

The young fellow said he was very sorry—he hadn't meant to be stand-offish. He wasn't one for company, but he'd try his best to make the other chaps like him if they'd give him a chance. Only he hoped they wouldn't chaff him about his studying in his own time or play any of their practical jokes on him, because if they did he was quite able to take care of himself and they'd find that he could use his fists.

"Well, my lad," I said, "so long as you don't damage the governor's property, and fight fair, I'm

not going to say that if they keep on getting at you an honourable set-to in the good old English fashion mightn't be the means of making things more comfortable for you. Only fight it out among yourselves, and don't come to me about it afterwards, that's all."

Two days afterwards I noticed one of the lads had as beautiful a pair of black eyes as ever I saw in my life, and I learnt that Steve Wilmot had "had it out," and established himself from that time forward as "all right when you know him." I was glad that things had settled themselves that way, as there is nothing more annoying to a man with a lot of hands under him than to have ill-feeling among them, and constant bickering and complaints and tale-carrying. I suppose the peace of a stable or a workshop or a factory is very like the peace of Europe. It's only really assured after the parties who keep snarling at each other have left off talking and had a real good fight.

It was about a week after the black eyes before I had a chance of going to the club, my second man being down again with rheumatics, poor fellow, and the night-work falling on me.

The first night I had "off," as the saying is, I looked in at the club just to have half an hour's gossip, and Tom Blanchflower coming in asked me how Steve Wilmot was getting on.

I told him, and then he said, "Ah! I'm glad of that. I wouldn't say anything about him till I

knew how he suited you, but as you've taken to him I'd like you to know all about him, because I'm sure if you can do him a good turn, and be a friend to him, you will."

And then he told me the story of the young man that was having a guinea a week from my governor for grooming horses and washing carriages, and a strange story it was—hardly to be believed if it hadn't been that the facts were easy to prove, and became known to me in another way afterwards.

"The first I knew of the young fellow," said Mr. Blanchflower, "was about five years ago, when him and his father come and took the rooms at the top of a house as belonged to a friend of mine.

"My friend had been valet to Sir Trevor when I first came into his service, but had had to leave through injuring his hand and almost losing the use of it, and so had married a young woman and they'd taken a small house and let it out in lodgings. They hadn't the capital to go into a West End lodging-house, but the wife had a little money saved and so had he, and they thought this little house, which was only about fifty pounds a year, would be a home for them, and they would let the rooms until they could find some business to go into that would suit them.

"Having got friendly with Mr. Legett—that was his name—when he was in Sir Trevor's service, I

used often to drop in of an evening when I was passing and have a chat, and it was one evening I was sitting in the parlour talking with him and his wife that they told me about a queer sort of gentleman that had taken their top room—the attic it was really—and come to live there with his son, a lad about fifteen.

"'He must be a gentleman,' said Mrs. Legett to me, 'because he's a major—leastways, he calls himself Major Wilmot, and, for the matter of that, there's no mistaking his ways and his manner of speaking. He's dreadfully odd, and frightens me out of my life at times by the queer things he says and does, but it's wonderful to see the boy wait on him and soothe him, and be more like a nurse or a servant to him than a son.

"'To see that boy wait on his father and watch him and bear with his tempers and his strange ways is enough to touch the heart of a stone,' said Mrs. Legett, 'and often of a night we sleeping below them can hear the Major pacing the room and talking out loud to himself, and in the morning when I go up early, just to see if there's anything I can do to help, I find the poor young fellow as often as not sitting in a chair by his father's bed fast asleep, worn out with watching him.'"

While Mr. Blanchflower was telling me all this I was wondering to myself how a Major in the Army's son could come to be a stable boy, so I

interrupted him and said, "Just let me understand —do you mean that the father of the young fellow in my stables was an officer and a gentleman?"

"Yes," said Mr. Blanchflower, "I do—though of course, Mr. and Mrs. Legett were like you at first, doubtful, knowing that plenty of the flash mob call themselves majors and captains when they're nothing more than broken-down adventurers and good-for-nothings.

"But this Major was genuine enough, there being things about the poor little barely-furnished attic he lived in that told anybody used to good families that they were in the presence of a broken-down gentleman.

"They were poor when they came to Mr. Legett's, but they got poorer afterwards, and it got to the boy going out to the pawnbroker's with things out of the big trunks they had brought with them, the day before the rent was due, which was only a few shillings. And there was a hungry, almost starved, look in the faces of the Major and the boy that went straight to Mrs. Legett's womanly heart, and made her think of all manner of excuses for getting them to try an Irish stew that she was famous for making, and a steak pie that she had a recipe for from her grandmother, who was cook in a nobleman's family.

"It wasn't with the Major her difficulty was, because his mind had begun to go, and Mrs. Legett curtseying and treating him like a superior

he began to think she was his servant, and allowed her to wait on him and send him up things to eat, but it was the boy whose pride had to be got over, he knowing that these people, who, perhaps, couldn't afford it, were giving them charity.

"He used to come down into the parlour now and then, being invited by Mrs. Legett while his father was asleep, he often dozing off of an evening and the poor lad wanting a change, and he found out I was a coachman and had a lot of horses, for one evening as I was leaving he followed me out into the passage and said, 'Mr. Blanchflower, do you know of any job I could get in a stable?'

"I looked at him for a moment and I said, 'You, my boy! What do you know about horses?'

"'Oh, I know a good deal,' he said. 'I can ride well, and I've always been where there were horses until two or three years ago—I'm sure I could soon learn what I don't know.'

"'Whose horses were you with?' I said.

"'My father's,' said the boy, taken off his guard. 'We had ten in our stables before——" then he stopped suddenly.

"'I see—I see,' I said. 'Well, if you wish it, I'll see if I can find you a job with Sir Trevor, my governor—but what will you do about your father?'

"'He won't be here, I expect, after this week,' he said; 'he'll be going away for some time.'

"I had a vacancy for a boy at the time, so I told

the lad when I was ready I'd try what he could do, and he thanked me and went upstairs.

"A week afterwards the young fellow came round to my place and said he was quite alone now, could I take him on trial? I said yes, I could take him on as a stable hand, but I couldn't find him a room in the place, as I was full up. He said that he could have a room at Mrs. Legett's for three shillings a week, and if he could earn enough over that just to keep himself he would be grateful. I put him to work to see how he would get through, and I found that a knowledge of horses was born in him, so to speak, and I knew he would pick up what he didn't know or hadn't been used to in no time, so I said ten shillings a week, and he looked as though he could have burst out crying for joy.

"That evening I went round to the Legetts' to find out what had happened, and it seems the poor Major, who had gone quite out of his mind and got violent, had been taken away to the County Lunatic Asylum.

"'The boy must have known what was going to happen,' I said.

"'Yes,' said Mrs. Legett, 'it was him that told us what to do, knowing the symptoms and seeing what was coming on. It seems his father had been in an asylum before, and when he was let out his wife was told that he would be well for a year or two, but the attack might come on again, and if it did he would have to be put under restraint again.

They were living in a little house then, and the boy heard it from his mother, and soon after the poor lady died, and the little money that was hers died with her, and the father and son gradually came down to have to take our attic. Ah! it's shocking to see gentlefolks come down like that.'

"Well," said Mr. Blanchflower, "young Steve stayed with me for over two years, and all that time his father was in the asylum, where he is now. The lad was as good a lad as could be wished for, and, being useful, I raised his wages till he got a pound a week. He was grateful to me, and he told me a lot—among other things that he'd had to leave school when he was twelve, but after his mother's death he'd tried to keep up his reading as much as possible, as he didn't want to grow up ignorant, but hoped some day to be able to get work that a gentleman of education might do.

"And talking things over with him so often and making myself his friend, he let out everything one evening. His grandfather had been known as Squire Wilmot and had owned a large estate in Kent and had been a great sportsman, and when his father came into the property it was one for any English gentleman to be proud of.

"But his father, the Major, had all the old squire's love of sport without the old squire's steadiness and common sense, and when he got his fortune began to gamble and back racehorses, and did things that were beyond all reason. But every-

body loved him about the place, he was such a fine, generous fellow, though his goings on at last got him the name of 'Mad Wilmot.' After a few years of gambling and backing horses, he got into difficulties, and began to part with the property to lawyers and people who lent him money, and one fine day it came out that he had lost twenty thousand pounds at cards and horse-racing at one Newmarket meeting.

"Mrs. Wilmot, his wife, terrified at the ruin that was coming on them, went to his lawyer's and asked if nothing could be done, and they told her her husband was undoubtedly insane, and she ought to have him certified and kept under restraint, or he would gamble his last shilling away and leave them homeless.

"The poor lady couldn't bear the idea of that, and so things went on till the crash came. Everything had gone, and the Major had to leave the old Hall, and then he was made a bankrupt. Soon after that he became so strange he had to be put in an asylum for a time, but, getting better, his wife took him out and brought him to the little house she had taken with her money, £200 a year, an annuity purchased for her by her father, a captain in the Navy, but that, of course, died with her, and then the boy, who was now his father's only friend, brought him to the Legetts' and took the attic, waiting upon the poor mad gentleman hand and foot, and devoting himself entirely to him. When the

Major had to be put under restraint, his madness returning, the lad came to me."

"A strange family history," I said, when Mr. Blanchflower had finished, "but there's one thing I don't understand—why didn't you keep Steve with you?"

"Why? Because the Wilmot property had just been sold again, and who do you think bought it?"

"Who?"

"My governor—Sir Trevor D'Arcy. In a few weeks he'll be taking possession, and we shall go there. You couldn't expect the poor young gentleman to be a stable lad on the estate to which only a few years ago he was the heir."

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You may be sure I treated Steve Wilmot with every consideration after that, but somehow or other I didn't feel quite comfortable with him. It went against the grain to order him about and to see him doing the work he was, knowing that but for the wheel of Fortune he would have been a young gentleman and me touching my hat to him. I wondered if I could do him any good by teiling my governor his story, so one day when Sir Walter was giving me my orders and talking to me in the library I mentioned the case.

Directly I'd said the name of Major Wilmot and the place where he'd lived, Sir Walter gave quite a start.

"Good heavens!" he said, seeming to be talking to himself, "what a terrible come down!"

"Did you know the family, sir?" I said.

"Yes, everybody knew Major Wilmot ten years ago. Why, he belonged to one of the oldest families in England. Tut, tut! it seems incredible. Fancy my having a stable boy who is a direct descendant of an English king—whose father is entitled to quarter the Royal Arms of England!"

That took my breath away.

"Descended from an English king, sir?" I said. "What—Steve Wilmot?"

"Yes, Wynterdyke. I'm a mushroom—a parvenu compared to this young fellow. He has the royal blood of the Plantagenets in his veins. I knew poor old Wilmot came a cropper and disappeared, but I never imagined he'd come to such poverty as this."

He thought a minute and then he said, "Send the lad round to me when you go back."

I went out of the library my head full of the wonderful idea that the lad I was paying a guinea a week to for stable work was a scion of royalty, as the saying is, and I had half an idea when I sent for Steve that I ought to say, "Will your Royal Highness condescend to go round to the governor?" but of course I put it differently.

An hour afterwards the young fellow returned and came to me and shook hands with me. "I'm

going away, Mr. Wynterdyke," he said, "but I want to thank you and your good wife for all your kindness to me."

I hadn't told the missus the truth yet, but she shook hands affably, liking the young fellow, and he went.

When he had gone I said to my wife, "My dear, you ought to have dropped a curtsey—Steve Wilmot is descended from a King of England and is of royal blood."

She laughed and said, "Go along, John!" But when I told her the whole story she said, "Well, I never!" and didn't get over it for weeks.

I asked my governor where the young chap had gone, but all he said was that he'd found him something better to do, and I had to be satisfied, but I thought perhaps Mr. Blanchflower would know more, so a night or two after, meeting him at the club, I asked him if he'd heard anything.

He told me that Steve had gone back to the Legetts', packed up the few things of his own and his father's, bidden them good-bye, and gone away. When I told him that the Wilmots were one of the Royal Families of England, he said, "God bless me! you don't say so!" And when I assured him that my governor, who was a great man on that sort of thing, had told me so, he put on his hat and walked off at once to the Legetts' to tell them that they'd had royalty staying under their roof.

* * * * * *

It was two years before I heard any more of the Wilmots. It was one afternoon that I was coming away from Tattersall's, when there'd been some horses sold, that I saw a handsome, well-dressed young gentleman walking along. I knew him in a moment, and I went up to him and said, "Ah, Mr. Wilmot, how do you do?"

He seemed very pleased to see me, and he walked by my side and told me all that had happened. My governor, Sir Walter, had sent him to a friend of his, an elderly gentleman, who wanted a strong young fellow; part as secretary, part as male attendant, and there he had had a good salary and a comfortable home for a time while Sir Walter was at work for him. It seems Sir Walter knew a gentleman who had "gone broke," as the saying is, years ago on the turf, and had at the time owed a gambling debt of £5,000 to the Major. The gentleman had recently come into a fortune. Sir Walter went to him, told him what he had found out, and got the £5,000 out of him and banked it for the Major and his son. A few months afterwards the Major was let out again, and his son with the money made a comfortable home for him and tended him in loving companionship as he used to do at the Legetts', and was able to see him once again dressed as a gentleman and having every comfort and quite happy. But his good fortune had not ended there. The old gentleman he had gone to be with had heard his story and taken a fancy to him, and when

he died, having no relations, had left him all his money.

"And what do you think I've done?" said young Mr. Wilmot, who, of course, knew from what I let out that Sir Walter had told me his true story. "Sir Trevor D'Arcy is anxious to let our old place again, and I've taken it, and in a few days I'm going to take my father back, and there please God he'll end his days."

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And that is the true story of a stable boy who was once with me—a young fellow with the royal blood of England in his veins. But he was luckier than some of the descendants of great families, for Mr. Hutchins, who has great families at his fingers' ends, told me when I was talking about what a romance it was, that one of the direct descendants of King Edward I. was a butcher, Mr. Joseph Smart, of Halesowen; and another was the keeper of a turnpike gate near Dudley; and that not very long ago the direct descendant of the Duke of Gloucester, son of King Edward III., had died the sexton of St. George's, Hanover Square; and that the great-great-granddaughter of Oliver Cromwell married a butcher's son, who had been an outdoor servant in the family she lived with as kitchen maid.

"Ah," I said, "it's wonderful; but I can't get over my having royalty in my employ—and fancy what a drop from a king to a stable boy!"

"Yes," said Mr. Hutchins, "but it jumps up as well as down sometimes. There was a stable boy once that went out groom abroad and became a Prime Minister. That was Tom Ward, a Yorkshire stable boy, who died Baron Ward in 1859."

Which shows that if there are wonderful downs in life there are wonderful ups too, though it isn't often you get a stable boy of the royal blood of England earning a guinea a week and blacking another stable boy's eyes for bullying him.

XI.—JIM DUMBLETON'S GOVERNOR.

HE was a good soul, was Jim Dumbleton, and I liked him, though at the club he was always being chipped because, though as fond of his pipe and a gossip as any of us, he never touched a drop of spirits or beer or anything that is what is called intoxicating. He used to let the fellows have their fling at him when he ordered his small lemon or his ginger ale, and when they'd finished he would say, "All right, lads, chip away—it does you good and it doesn't hurt me, and here's your very good health." Then he'd lift up his glass of Temperance tipple and have a drink at it and smack his lips.

We didn't so much mind Jim, because he wasn't always trying to ram Temperance down our throats like some do, being regular wet blakets and Jeremiahs, and trying to make out that a pint of beer is the pathway to perdition, and a drop of brandy the Devil's own particular pick-me-up.

Not that I'm going to say that drink isn't a terrible thing, and in our profession has brought hundreds of good men to ruin, and their wives and children to misery, to say nothing of the dreadful accidents that have happened through a man being the worse for liquor on the box, and I've always

fought shy of men who, when out exercising, would pull up at public-houses. A man who's got the reins in his hands wants his brains in his head, and a coachman the worse for drink is at the bottom of half the bad accidents that we read about in the newspapers.

But there's moderation in all things, and a man can like his glass without perilling either his soul or his neck, just as a man can take his piece of steak without choking himself or bringing on a fit of apoplexy. There's plenty of young uns die of eating too many apples and plums in the cholera season, but that don't make apples an invention of the Devil or plums a national curse, and that's not a reason why sober, sensible men and women should make a vow never to touch a bit of fruit again as long as they live, and wear a bit of green ribbon in their buttonhole to let everybody know it.

I used to chip Jim Dumbleton a bit myself at first, being for common-sense in all things, and holding that a hard-working chap who was out in all weathers wanted something warmer at the pit of the stomach than a drop of windy lemonade; but after he'd told me what had made him sign the pledge I never chipped him any more, but respected him for what he'd done.

It was quite by accident that I came to know what it was that had made him turn teetotaler. One night after the club had shut, which it had to do at public-house closing time, being on licensed

premises, Jim Dumbleton and me went out together, and he said he'd walk a bit of the way with me, his place being on my road.

We were walking along talking about one thing and another, and had just turned into a main thoroughfare, when a ragged, disreputable-looking fellow of about fifty, evidently the worse for liquor, lurched up against us. "Beg your pardon," he said in a thick, hoarse voice. He had cannoned up against Jim so hard that his battered old billycock hat had fallen off on to the pavement.

"He'll have a job to pick that up in his condition," I said to Jim, and we both stopped for a minute to see how he'd manage, because if ever you've seen a man that's very drunk try to pick up anything off the ground you know that it's a comical sight—that is, of course, it would be comical if it wasn't dreadful to see a fellow-creature making such a degraded exhibition of himself.

The old reprobate when we looked at him was bending down and making frantic efforts to pick up his hat, but directly his fingers got near it he staggered about three feet away from it to save himself from falling on his nose. It wasn't very light just where we were, the shops and public-houses being all shut, and the gas lamps giving off the usual amount of light they do in London, which is just about enough for you to know that they're there and that's all.

Dumbleton and me stood watching the drunken man for a minute, and then I said, "Come on—he'll be half an hour," and we were just going when the man suddenly lurched upright and staggered towards us, and said, "Pick it up for me, one of you fellows, will you? I'm d—— if I can!"

And then you might have knocked me down with a feather, so to speak, for all of a sudden Jim Dumbleton gave a little cry as if he'd been hit, and straightened himself up and touched his hat, and then went and picked up the dirty, battered old billycock, wiped the mud off it with his handkerchief, and handed it to the drunken man.

Then he touched his hat again, and said, "I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't know it was you. Good-night, sir." Then he came to me and said, "Come away, for God's sake!" and we started walking as quick as if we'd been making haste to get to a fire before the engines had put it out.

Of course, I was knocked by what I'd seen, and couldn't make it out at all. As soon as I'd caught Jim up—for he'd started so fast he'd got a yard or two ahead of me—I said: "Whatever did you touch your hat to a man like that for? Who is he?"

We were under a gas lamp just then, and I noticed that Jim's face was quite white.

"It's awful!" he said. "It's made me go hot

and cold all over. Good Lord! Fancy him coming to that."

"But who is he?"

"Well, you'd hardly believe it, Wynterdyke, but that unhappy man was once my master."

"Your master?"

"Yes, my master, and I drove him for five years, and that's why I touched my hat to him."

"What was he then—a job-master?"

"Job-master be hanged! I was never in a job-yard. He was a doctor—a real first-class doctor in a big town, and had patients all over the county, and made his thousands a year, being a clever surgeon, and now——"

"Awful!" I said, beginning to grasp Jim's meaning. "But if you hadn't told me I'd never have believed that such a thing was possible as for an M.D.—even a country one—to come to that."

"That was him, right enough," said Jim, "that was my old governor. I've seen him in dreadful straits before now, and I've seen him do awful things. It was seeing how things were going with him through drink, and the ruin and misery they brought with 'em, that made me go off one day and sign the pledge there and then, being terrified of what drink could do, and wishing never to touch another drop all my life for fear of things, but I never thought as he'd come to be a dirty drunken street loafer. Why, good

heavens, man, did you see him? he was in rags—filthy rags; he looked like one of them vagabonds as dosses in the Park or on the Embankment. Oh, dear! I shan't get over it for a month."

Before we got to where our roads parted Jim Dumbleton had told me the story of Dr. Marchison (of course the name wasn't Marchison, that being a name I have used thinking it would not be right to give the real one), who had been his governor for five years, keeping his carriages and horses and his fine house and servants, and being respected and looked up to, not only in the town where he practised, but the whole county, he being sent for in consultation to all the best county families when there was serious illness.

When Mr. Dumbleton had first gone into his service he was a gentleman you would have thought would never have done an ungentlemanly action, but would have held his head up proudly among the best. It was after Jim had been with him a couple of years that the trouble began. It seems the doctor's wife, who suffered with something that when it came on caused her terrible pain, took to taking a drug of some kind unknown to the doctor. He would have found it out, but she had gone away to the seaside for her health at the time she began the habit, and as he could not get away from his practice very often to see her she took care that she was all right when he was expected.

But after she came back home he very soon

noticed something was wrong by her strange way, and her being often muddled and having a wild look in her eyes and forgetting things, and one day it suddenly burst upon him what she was doing, and he was almost beside himself, for he was devoted to her and his little daughter, Miss Ethel, and he knew that the stuff she was taking meant ruin to body and brain.

He pleaded with her with tears in his eyes, and she promised she'd give the stuff up. He went to the chemist's where he'd found she'd been getting it, and made the man vow he'd never supply another drop to her or any of his people. But it was all no use. She got it—how, he never found out, but he knew she was taking it, and one day he found nearly a dozen empty bottles all hidden away in the wardrobe inside a bonnet box.

And she wasn't only taking that, she was getting the spirits out of the wine-cellar as well, and at last was always either half stupid or drunk. He stopped the drug, or mixture, or whatever the stuff is women get from the chemists to stupefy themselves with at last by going to every single chemist in the town and getting them to help him, and he locked up all the spirits and went to the grocers and stopped them sending such things in, and there he hoped it would end. But while he was away on one of his long journeys she would go out into the town and drink in the hotel bars and places, and one day was brought back by the police just as he

had stepped out of the brougham that had met him at the station, and he had to see his own wife —a lady—being carried into her own house, senseless drunk, by two police-constables who knew him well and touched their helmets to him.

After that she became dangerous and turned cruel in her madness, even to her little girl, who became terrified out of her life at her mother. The doctor had decided that he must put his wife away as she was no longer safe to be left, and he was making arrangements for her to be sent to a home for inebriates, as I think it is called, when a frightful thing happened. One day while he was out she got away from the woman who was looking after her and went down the garden where her little girl was at play. She called the child to come to her, saying, "Ethel, come here"; but the little girl was frightened, knowing how violent her mamma was, and she ran away down the path. The excited woman went after the child, saying dreadful things in her madness. At the bottom of the garden there was a wall, and some workmen were at work at it, but had gone to their dinner. They had left some lime they were using in a little heap. When the mother came to the heap, the child, who was nearly caught, turned and darted away again suddenly, and the mother in her rage picked up a handful of the lime and flung it in the child's face.

At that moment the woman who had been left in charge came running out and seized the mother,

and the little girl who was crying out in agony was taken indoors.

When the doctor came home that evening he knew that his little daughter would never see again. Her mother had blinded her for life.

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The doctor put his wife away altogether after that, and soon after she died, but the horror of his sweet little girl being blinded by her mother's own hand, and all the torture and shame he had suffered, had weakened his nerves, and to prevent himself from thinking he began to drink, and presently he drank heavily, and then little by little his practice fell off, for no one ever knew how he would be, and patients were afraid to trust him. And one day he made a terrible mistake which nearly cost a lady her life, and it got about and from that day he was a ruined man, and drank and drank, and sank lower and lower. His daughter was taken from him by a relative, and that broke his heart and was the last straw. He still lived in the house on the money he had saved, and Mr. Dumbleton was his coachman, but he didn't practise any more. Then it was that Mr. Dumbleton saw the shocking scenes. He had to help to carry his master out of the bars and smoking-rooms of hotels when he was helplessly drunk, and put him in the carriage and take him home. All this time he was flinging money away recklessly, and it is no wonder that in two years, when he was always suffering from delirium tremens,

it was found he had spent all his capital. Soon after he was bankrupt and everything was sold off, and it was supposed he had gone to London.

Mr. Dumbleton left when the horses and carriages were sold and got a place in town. He never saw his master after he left until the night we met him, a broken-down, disreputable-looking loafer trying to pick his battered billycock up from the muddy pavement.

When Mr. Dumbleton said good-night after telling me that story, he said, "Now you know what I've seen come of drink you don't wonder at me turning teetotaler, do you?" and I said, "No, Jim, I don't—I almost feel inclined to go and sign the pledge myself."

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I didn't see Jim Dumbleton more than once again at the club after that, for the people he was with "gave up," as we say among ourselves, meaning they sold their horses and put down their carriages, the gentleman being a stockbroker, and having gone in for a big speculation which came off the wrong way, and he was "hammered." I don't know what this is, but I'm told it stops a stockbroker doing any more business. Jim being out of a berth, had to look for another, and got one with a religious nobleman and his wife who lived five miles from everywhere in Scotland, and were glad to have Dumbleton, he being a strict teetotaler.

It was quite two years before I saw him again,

and then I met him quite accidentally up at a horse dealer's at Chelsea, where I had gone to look at a pair for Sir Walter. He was in the yard talking to Mr. Smith, the dealer, and when he saw me he said, "Well, that's a rum thing! I was just talking about you and asking if you were still with your old governor. Being in town for a couple of days I was coming to see you."

"Then come, old chap," I said, "and welcome. You know the address. The missus and me will expect you to tea."

With that I shook hands and went to look at the pair the foreman was having put in for me.

About six o'clock Jim Dumbleton turned up, and as soon as the missus had poured him out his tea, and we'd settled down a bit, I asked him how he was getting on in Scotland.

"Oh, I've left there," he said. "I'm going to a new place in the West of England at the end of this week, and I'm buying a couple of horses to take down with me."

"Oh, somebody that's taking up, eh?"

"Yes—somebody that's taking up again, but that I've been with before."

"Not the stockbroker?"

"No—the doctor."

I was just drinking my tea when he said that, and it knocked me so much that some went the wrong way, and the missus had to hit me on the back for a minute before I could speak.

"You don't mean the drunken one we met that night?" I gasped as soon as I'd got a bit of breath to go on with.

"Yes, I do. He's back in his old profession, and he's going to start practice again."

Then he told me how inquiries had been made for him and he'd had a letter in consequence in Scotland, and it was from his old governor offering him his old berth again. He'd been to see him, and afterwards had learnt how it had all come about.

"The doctor when we met him was living in a common fourpenny lodging-house when he had fourpence and sleeping on the Embankment when he hadn't.

"One night, while asleep on the Embankment, a gentleman who was coming along there late was set on by the roughs, who tried to rob him. The doctor waking up suddenly, and forgetting for the minute I suppose that he was only an outcast, jumped up and went to the gentleman's assistance, and trying to help him got an awful blow on the head that knocked him senseless.

"The roughs made off, hearing a policeman coming, and then the gentleman, who knew what the outcast had done for him, had him taken to St. Thomas's Hospital at once, and went with him, saying he had practically saved his life.

"He was a very great man it seems—a nobleman, and in the House of Lords, which was what

took him on the Embankment so late. He went every day to see how the poor fellow was getting on, and then he heard from one of the doctors at St. Thomas's who had recognised the patient, having known him professionally years ago, that the poor outcast was a Dr. Marchison who had taken to drink through his misfortunes and come to ruin and degradation.

"When Dr. Marchison got right, the nobleman had all new clothes ready waiting for him, and said, 'Now, doctor, you are coming down to my country place to stay till you are quite well,' and took him with him.

"And while there he was so charmed with his cleverness, and his learning, and his gentlemanly ways that he said, 'Look here—our big doctor about here is getting old, and wants to retire. You are going to take his place.' And he wouldn't take no for an answer, but did everything, and put my old governor in a fine house, and started him and introduced him to everybody, and soon by his skill and cleverness he became celebrated in this county as he used to be in his own, and the rich people would have nobody else to attend them.

"And now he's setting up his carriage and horses again, for he is making money enough to afford it."

"And the drink?"

"Oh, he's given that up. It seems—for he told

me himself—that meeting me that night while he was sunk so low gave him a shock that sobered him, and the first thing the nobleman made him promise was to sign the pledge, and he did, and he'll keep to it all his life."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said my wife, who had heard the story from me about the doctor's misfortunes, and has as sympathetic and motherly a little heart as any woman in England, God bless her! "But the little blind daughter—is she with him now?"

"Yes," said Jim Dumbleton, "she's with him. She's grown up into the prettiest young lady you can imagine, and it was a beautiful sight to me the day I went to call on my old master to see him walking about in his lovely garden, Miss Ethel leaning on his arm and he leading her gently, and she with her sightless eyes turned on him as though looking at him, and a happy smile upon her sweet face that an angel might have practised in front of a looking-glass.

"Ah, it will be like old times, me driving the governor and Miss Ethel about again, and I'd have taken the place if the salary had only been my living and my livery, hanged if I wouldn't!"

And there was a look on Jim's face as he spoke those words that told me he meant 'em.

After he had gone the missus would talk of nothing else. She seemed as happy as though it had been one of her own family that had been

"down in the depths" and come back to happiness again.

And I felt a feeling of that sort myself, for somehow or other that wretched, broken-down gentleman trying to pick up his billycock and too drunk to do it, and Jim touching his hat to him, had haunted me and made me unhappy whenever I thought about it.

XII.—CON DOOLAN'S LUCK.

A SMART, well set-up chap he was, which was only natural, seeing that he had been in the army, and he drove like most soldier coachmen generally do, as if he were charging the enemy. You can always tell a soldier on the box, first by the way he sits, which is as if he'd swallowed a poker, as the saying is, and second by the way he drives, which is as if he was going between gates and posts at the trot and the gallop at the Military Tournament at the Agricultural Hall.

Many gentlemen like a man that has been in the army, and I won't say that they have not many good points—neatness, punctuality, obedience, and smartness of turn-out being some of the best, but I prefer civilian driving, which is because perhaps I'm one myself.

Con Doolan was made a member of our club when he was in London service with a young gentleman who had come quite young into a lot of money. Extravagant is not the word for the way that young fellow carried on; insanity would be nearer the mark. This young fellow was what is called a "plunger," and while his money lasted his name was as well known as that of any of the dukes and marquises who had been racing for generations,

because the bets he would have on a horse took people's breath away. It was him that laid £10,000 to £1,000 on a horse at Goodwood when there were only two runners, and it was reckoned the favourite couldn't be beaten unless it dropped down dead. But it just got done on the post by a short head. The horse's name, I think, was Satiety, which means "more than enough," I was told, and I should think it was more than enough for that young fellow.

It wasn't only in these things he was extravagant, but it was said he never wore a shirt more than once, and had a new high hat every week, and once on a railway journey not having any cigarette papers with him, tore up a £100 note and rolled tobacco up in it.

Of course there was soon an end of that, and Con Doolan, who was his coachman, driving him about in a wonderful smart little brougham, which was fitted up like a boudoir, was out of a berth. What was awkward was that he had a bother to get a character, for the young fellow owed everybody a bit at the finish, and got out of the way to avoid his creditors, and so when Con went after a place and they wanted a personal character from his late employer, he had to say that he couldn't give it because the young gentleman had gone away, nobody knew where to, except his solicitors, and they wouldn't tell anybody.

Con was in a great state about it at the club one

night, and wondered whatever he should do. Of course he had his army character, but that wasn't his late employer. However, soon afterwards he got a place with a swell bookmaker who lived in a big house at Kew, and kept a good establishment and carriages and horses, and did the thing in good style. When Con went there he was not very often in town of a night, so that we didn't see much of him, and after a time he quite dropped out, though we often spoke about him. He was a great favourite because he was a regular Irishman, with a witty tongue as they all have, and a way of putting things that was so odd you couldn't help laughing even when he was talking quite serious.

Through his not coming to the club I lost sight of Con Doolan altogether, and it was very nearly two years after he had gone to be coachman to the swell bookmaker that I came across him again.

I'd driven Sir Walter and her ladyship to a garden party at Esher, and had put up at the Bear, and was standing smoking a cigar in the yard before having a stroll round, when who should come into the yard in livery but Con himself.

"Shure, an' if it isn't Mr. Wynterdyke!" he said, and he came up and gripped my hand with a broad grin on his face that it was a pleasure to see again.

"Got your lot here, Con?" I said, after the usual remarks about hoping he was well, and that sort of thing.

"Yes," he said, "my people's at the garden party at Lord ——'s."

"What, the bookmaker?" I said.

Con laughed and shook his head. "No, me bhoy," he said, "I've done wid the turf this year or more and I'm dhriving a young married couple, but I've only been in the place a fortnight, and I'm just wondering if it's going to be like the rest, or if I'm to know peace and quietness once more before I die."

"Haven't you had a good time then?" I said.

"Good time! 'Tis the devil himself that sat beside me on the box iver since the young gintleman I was with made ducks and drakes of the fortchin that Providence had sent him, more's the pity. Now ye'll not belave me, but it's the trut' I'm tellin' ye, 'tis myself that the bad luck's followed till I'm axing myself if maybe I've had the black curse put upon me at my birth by some ould witch that my mother, Heaven rest her soul! had disturbed at her incantations."

"Well, you look pretty well on it all," I said, for Con had a fine fresh colour on him, and his eyes had a merry twinkle in them that I've noticed most Irishmen's generally have.

"Well, I tell you what's happened to me these two years," said Con, and as I had a couple of hours before I put, to to fetch my people, and Con wasn't ordered till the same time, I suggested that we might as well have a stroll. He said "All

right," and I offered him a cigar, but he pulled out an old black cutty pipe, and said if I didn't mind he'd sooner smoke that, and we went strolling away together.

I didn't have much to say for the next three-quarters of an hour, for Con, glad I suppose to have somebody to tell his troubles to, never stopped in the story of his misfortunes, except to take that black cutty out of his mouth now and again, and fill it up and relight it.

What he told me I must write in English, because I couldn't for the life of me put it in the Irish way, not being Charles Lever or Handy Andy or Mr. Dion Boucicault, and never having studied Irish except at the theatre, when the low comedian is generally Dan or Pat or Denis O'Something or other, and begins everything he says with "Bedad!" or "Begorrah!" and wishes everybody "the top of the morning," but in real life none of the Irishmen I have met ever did anything of the sort.

"When I went to the bookmaker," says Con after he'd got his pipe to draw, which took him a minute or two, "I made up my mind that if I liked the place I'd a chance of stopping on, for the bookmaker will last out half a dozen backers, and my new governor was one of those that bet with the swells and stand up against the rails in Tattersall's ring, most of his business being on the nod as it is called, that is, no money passing but everything settled by cheque on Monday at the Victoria Club.

"But he always had to have a lot of ready money about him, as most of them—even the biggest of all, who bet in hundreds—do, because sometimes the big backers will come to them and make it a ready money bet, and foreigners who haven't an account will sometimes come up and take five or ten to one on a big race to a hundred and hand up the notes.

"One day the master came to me as I was putting-to, to take him to Hurst Park, and he said to me, 'Doolan, you've been a soldier?' and I said 'Yes, sorr.' Then he said, 'Then you're not afraid of firearms?' And I said, 'It's a mighty fine soldier I'd have been, sorr, if I was afraid of my rifle.' Then says he, 'Doolan, I'm going to give you a loaded revolver, and you're never to go out without it this winter when you're driving me to the races or back again. The word's been passed that the boys'—that's the thieves who go racing, Mr. Wynterdyke—'are going to stick some of the bookmakers up the first foggy afternoon after the races are over, and they know that I drive home and have a power of gold and bank notes about me.'

"'Make your mind aisy, sorr,' I said. 'The first man that tries to stop the horses will have a bit of lead in his stomach that he never swallowed.'

"With that he gives me the revolver, and he says, 'Take care, Doolan,' he says. 'Don't forget that it's loaded firearms you're carrying, and for

goodness' sake don't shoot anybody unless you're obliged to!'

"That was the first day of the meeting, and I walked about the course with the revolver in my pocket, and had a look at some of the bhoys, as I'd got to know pretty well by this time, and thinks I, 'Ye're a white-faced bread-and-butter lot, and I'll make short work of half a dozen of you if you come any of your divilment with me or the masther, bad scran to ye!'

"When the races were over the masther he came across the course to where I was waiting for him with the brougham, and one or two more of the bookmakers were with him. They were going across to the station, and were keeping together, and they'd three or four fighting men that are regular hands on the turf along with them, and they were talking about what the masther had told me, that a job had been put up by the bhoys to 'go over them,' which means in Christian language to rob them. They said good afternoon to the governor, and went away together all of a bunch, and the governor got into the brougham and said 'Home.'

"I went slow off the course, the people not having cleared off, and some of the horses being put-to in the carriages and 'buses, and having my eyes about me I noticed as there was a couple of the bhoys walking quick behind the brougham, and two more of them going on ahead.

"Thinks I to myself 'they're afther no good!' but I didn't see what they could do there, and I knew directly I got outside I could whip up and be half a mile ahead of them before they'd time to say good afthernoon.

"But when I got out of the gates there was a lot of hansoms and flys that hadn't paid to come in, waiting there to pick up their lots, and I saw the two bhoys who'd gone ahead jump into a sort of a dog cart as a man was standing at the horse's head.

"I whipped up and went on, but in a moment or two I heard the clatter of hoofs behind, and I looked round and it was them following, and they'd got a horse as was as fast as my pair and faster. I slowed up to let them pass me, but they wouldn't go on. They slowed and followed. Thinks I to myself, 'If it's highway robbery, my bhoys, I've got something for you as it is more blessed to give than to receive,' and I pulled out the revolver and tucked it in handy under the strap of the seat.

"But nothing happened, and when I turned down the long lonely winding lane that led to our house, which stood in its own grounds, I turned my head and saw them pass by on the high road.

"'That's all right,' I said to myself. 'They were driving home and I've misjudged 'em.'

"The next day, soon after the first race, the fog came up over the river, and it was as much as

you could do to see the horses pass the winning-post.

"It got so thick that after the second race the stewards decided that it wasn't safe to go on, and the governor sent a message across to me to put-to at once, and send back word to Tattersall's ring when I was ready, as he wouldn't come out to stand in the fog on the course till I was.

"While I was putting the horses to, one of the men who look after the carriage enclosure said to me, 'The bhoys will have a fine time of it—I hear the band is going to play.' I knew what he meant by the 'band playing,' and I thought to myself, 'Well, there's one good thing—when we get out on the road in this fog it will puzzle any of 'em to get at us, for they won't be able to see where we are.'

"When I was ready the governor came across. He looked about to see nobody was near, and he gave me a parcel of bank notes and says, 'Put this in your pocket,' he says. 'They won't go for you but for me, if they're up to their games.' Then he got in. 'Go steady, Doolan,' he says in a nervous voice. 'It's an awful afternoon and it's getting thicker every minute. And mind, if anybody stops the horses you let off a couple of barrels—it will frighten them away. I don't want to be knocked about.'

"I got out of the gates all right, a man walking at the horses' heads for me, and once on the road I

turned their heads for home, and let the reins loose after checking 'em to a walking pace, knowing that they'd find their way a thundering sight better than I could find it for them.

"We had been walking along for about a quarter of an hour, me stopping now and then, and shouting out when I saw anything black that looked like something coming, and everything was quiet and death-like, and awful, for you could have cut that fog with a knife, when all of a sudden a black figure seemed to jump out of the fog just in front of us, and a voice called out 'Stop!'

"The governor, he heard it, for the carriage door opened and I saw him jump out, and I could see something that looked like a house at the side, and I said to myself, 'He's bolted in there to get help.'

"It was so thick that I could only see a dim outline at the horses' head, but the voice said 'Stop!' again, and with that I whipped out the revolver and fired. The figure gave a yell and fled. 'That's all right,' I said. 'Now, then, if there are any more of you, come on!' I hollered, and grasped my pistol. My horses had reared at the sound of the firing, and were a bit frightened, and I had a job to steady them, and they'd gone on twenty yards before I could stop them.

"Then I remembered the governor, and I turned round to go back where he was, intending to shout out it was all right,

"I hadn't gone twenty yards peering about, before all of a sudden I saw a dark figure standing in the middle of the road. It said 'Stop!' and, thinks I 'It's some of the gang.' So I pulled out the revolver again to fire in the air, but it went off before I meant it, and the figure bounded into the air and says, 'You d—— fool, you've shot me!'

"And I'm blest if it wasn't the governor himself, and I hadn't known his voice in the fog. I got down more dead than alive, and I says, 'What'll I do? You aren't killed, are you, sir?' And he says, 'I'm hit in the leg—I can't move.'

"While I was trying to lift him into the carriage I heard wheels and I shouted, and the wheels stopped and the gentlemen in the trap came along, and I says, 'Gentlemen, whoever you are, my governor's fainted—help me to lift him in the carriage.'

"They crowded round and helped me, and we got him in, and I got up on the box and drove through the fog, yelling all the way for things to get clear till I got to our house more by luck than judgment. The servants helped the governor out and I went off for a surgeon.

"Well, it wasn't a bad wound, and as soon as the doctor said it wouldn't be much I felt in my pockets for the notes and I'm blest if they hadn't gone.

"The governor, though terrified out of his life about his leg, was like a madman when I blurted

it out. But it wasn't till a week afterwards we found out how I'd been robbed. It was the bhoys who'd been following us in a trap, and had seen the governor give me the notes on the course and had come after us, and I'd never recognised them, and they'd robbed me while I was helping the governor in.

"And the next day I saw in the papers that a policeman who had tried to stop the carriage which nearly ran over him had been shot through the helmet, and I knew it was me as had done it, but I didn't say anything; no more did the governor, I'll bet, though I never knew for certain, because he said I was an infernal idiot and gave me a fortnight's wages and sacked me the same evening without a character, being like a raging lunatic with a hole in his own leg and his bank notes in other people's pockets."

"I hope you were luckier in your next place," I said, trying to look as sympathetic as I could.

"Lucky! Hark at that, now," said Con. "Shure 'twas the Fates that were against me intoirely. The next place that I had was to drive a music-hall gentleman, and I had to wait outside the halls while he did his turn and then drive him to another, and one night he was coming out of the stage door of one, when a female came up to him and says, 'Oh, you black-hearted villain,' she says, 'I've found you, have I! Ain't I your lawful wife?' and with that, being just

mad drunk, began to hit him with her umbrella and scratch him, and a crowd came round and he had to bolt into the brougham and calls out to me, 'Drive like the devil!' and I started, being sorry for him being so humiliated by that virago.

"But she was up by the side of me on the box before I could get through the crowd, and she says, 'He's my husband—where he goes, I'll go!' And before I could say a word, blest if she wasn't hammering away at me, saying I was as bad as he was, and the way that she-cat knocked me about, me not daring to let go the reins to protect myself, was something to remember. The policeman came and pulled her off at last, but I'd a black eye, and my face was unfit for publication for a fortnight afterwards, and I said to the governor, though he'd behaved handsome to me, 'No more of it, thank you, sir! I should be trembling on the box every night for fear that virago should be anywhere in the neighbourhood,' and I gave him a fortnight and left.

"Then I was out for nearly two months till I'd the good fortune to hear of a young gentleman I'd known when I was driving the young governor who ran through his fortune, and he'd just got married and was setting up, and he took me on, and this is his lot. I've been with him a fortnight, and, please the powers, I'm going to settle down into respectable service again; but I misdoubt me, after what I've gone through, but

that the bad luck's waiting for me somewhere round the corner."

I told Con I hoped not, and we went back to have a glass together, and then I had the horses put-to and went to pick up at the garden party.

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Some time afterwards I heard Con, who was still in the same place, had got married, and I said to myself, "Ah, now he's all right; his luck has changed."

That was about two years ago. The other night he came into the public-house where our club is, and sent a message to me, and I went out to him.

He was standing in the bar, looking the picture of misery. "Hullo, Con!" I said; "how are you? What can I do for you?"

"Well, it's this way," he said. "I know that you're a scholar, and I want you to write a letter for me."

"Certainly," I said. "Who to?"

"To her Blessed Majesty," says Con, "for it's a power of throuble I'm in, Mr. Wynterdyke. I want you to tell her that as the lawful husband of my wife I'm entitled to the sum of three pounds, and I'd be glad if she'd kindly let me have it as soon as possible, for 'tis a terrible blow to come upon a man all at once, and what the devil will I do with the three of 'em, and my first only twelve months old!"

I couldn't help laughing, he looked so pitiful;

but I promised to call round the next day, and after he'd gone I went back into the club and told the members of poor Con Doolan's new bit of bad luck, and as most of us had known him and liked him we made up a subscription among ourselves, and went round to a lot of men we knew, and the next day I took him £10.

I put it down on the table, and I said, "There you are, Con. Never mind about her Majesty's Bounty, but there's the bounty of a few old friends of yours. Only don't let it happen again."

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XIII.—TOM BARRAS.

Two years ago I couldn't have written what I am going to write, and am only doing it now feeling that to leave it out of my memoirs—which perhaps some day if these papers are ever published they may be called—would be a pity.

The reason I couldn't have written it is that two years ago Tom Barras was alive and well known, but I don't think he would have been alive many hours longer if I had given him away by revealing what I knew about him.

Even now I'm rather worried as to whether I ought not to carry the secret to the grave with me, as the saying is, but I can't make up my mind to do that. Only I shall have to be careful not to say too much, because I don't want anybody ever to know who the people I am going to write about really were, as that would be risking somebody perhaps dropping down on me, and there are more wonderful things going on day and night in London —not to mention other parts of the United Kingdom—than are even put into those wonderful melodramas where such ghastly horrors are always happening to nice-looking young gentlemen and beautiful young ladies on the posters that you see on the hoardings as you drive about.

And really sometimes when I've been on the box driving home empty, and have lighted a cigar, and let the horses take it easy, and have had a good look at the hoardings that I passed by, I have wondered why it is that the young gentlemen and ladies in dramas are never able to settle down comfortably in life together until they have been laid down to be run over by a steam roller, or been hurled over a precipice, or nearly cut in half by a steam saw, or lured to a lonely spot where the door of a cage of lions has been left open, or dropped through a trap door into the River Thames which is conveniently situated under the kitchen floor.

I always thought that such things only happened in the drama or in boys' stories that are sold in penny numbers, until I met Tom Barras, and heard his story, which if I were to say what his governor's real name was all the world would know was only too true.

Tom Barras was first introduced into the club by a young fellow who was valet to an Irish member of Parliament, and we soon found that he was what is called a very eligible member, for he was one of the quietest, best behaved, and most gentlemanly men that ever put on livery, and what was a very good quality in him was that he was a good deal fonder of listening to what was said than of talking himself, which is more than I can say for most of the others.

Everybody in the club looked upon him as a

coachman in good service, he living with a tall, military-looking, clean-shaven gentleman, who had chambers in Piccadilly and a pretty little house at Ealing, where he spent a good deal of his time with his wife and daughter, the daughter being a most beautiful young lady of eighteen, but very fragile and delicate-looking, and as I heard afterwards suffering with her heart, and liable to fainting fits through it whenever upset or excited.

When Tom Barras was asked about his governor —it being the habit of our members, I'm sorry to say, to be like ordinary folks in wanting to know everybody's business, especially their masters' and missuses'—he always said that he was an American military officer, who had come over to this country to look after a big patent in which he was interested, and that was why he had to have chambers in town, but he had taken the house at Ealing—which was a pretty little place in its own grounds—because the noise and excitement of London were too much for his invalid daughter, Miss Norah.

I don't suppose I should have known more about Tom Barras than anybody else (he would have disappeared from the club one day and been forgotten like lots of others) if it hadn't been for one of those extraordinary accidents that are always happening to show how small the world is.

I was coming back about one o'clock in the morning from a fire I had been out to see, it being a thing I never could resist, and as I came up

Marylebone Road I saw two men come out of a little garden door let into the wall of a house that I had really hardly noticed being there before. They came out, and got into a four-wheeler that was waiting for them, and drove off, and as they did so a hansom cab that had been crawling along whipped up and went off in the same direction. Just as the driver whipped up his horse a drunken woman staggered off the pavement, and before the hansom cabman could pull up, the wheel was over her.

There was nobody about at the time, the road being quite empty, and so I ran to see if I could help. When I got there the man had got down off his box and was trying to get the woman on to the kerb and asking her if she was hurt.

I came up and caught hold of the woman to help him, and she being very drunk and frightened began to yell and halloo, and put up her hands, and in her excitement caught hold of the man's beard—*and it came off!*

I was so startled by such an extraordinary thing that I let go of the woman, and started back and stared at the man's face as though it had been a ghost.

We were just under a gas-lamp, and what I saw made me gasp out an exclamation that got as far as, "Well, I'm——" and then left off suddenly. The hansom cabman who had run over the drunken woman *was Tom Barras.*

He looked very white when he saw I had recognised him, and he said, "Mr. Wynterdyke, give me your word you won't say anything about this till I have seen you to-morrow? Stop by this woman till a policeman comes up—she isn't hurt much, I'm sure—and don't give me away. I'll explain everything in the morning."

With that he climbed up on to the box again, cracked his whip, and drove off at a gallop in the direction the four-wheeler had gone.

I was too dumbfounded to say "Yes" or "No," and after he'd gone it wasn't till one or two stragglers came up and began to ask what was up with the woman that I really knew where I was.

Then I said it was a drunken woman who'd got under a cab, that the man had driven off, and I didn't think she was much hurt; and presently a policeman came up and we got her on her legs, and she could walk all right, only staggering through being drunk, and began to use such language to the police and behaved so abominably that he thought the best thing was to run her in and let the police surgeon have a look at her. And after taking my name and address, because I'd let out I'd seen the accident, he walked her off, she calling him all the worst names she could lay her tongue to.

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The thing worried me so much I couldn't sleep, but kept thinking of it and lay awake all night. I

knew Tom Barras as coachman to an American military gentleman, and I had met him at one o'clock in the morning driving a hansom with a number to it and wearing a false beard.

I didn't say anything to my wife, having promised Barras to keep his secret, but I felt as if I was mixed up with something wrong, especially as he had driven off without waiting for the policeman to come to the woman he had run over.

At twelve o'clock Tom Barras came round to my place in his private clothes, but he stopped at the stable door till I came down, and then said, "Come along out," and I put on my hat and went.

As soon as we got where it was quiet and nobody to overhear us, Barras asked me what had happened with the woman, and I told him I didn't think there was anything much the matter with her, and he seemed relieved at that, and then he said:

"Mr. Wynterdyke, I'm going to trust you because in a kind of way I owe you an explanation, but as others are concerned besides myself I must ask you to give me your word of honour as a man that so long as I live and so long as my governor lives you will never breathe a word of what I tell you to a living soul, not even to your own wife."

"I can't give you any such promise," I said, "until I know if it is anything that as an honest man I ought not to keep to myself. I've got my good name and my wife and children to study, and

I'm not going to help anybody to defeat the ends of justice, as the saying is."

"By keeping my secret, Mr. Wynterdyke," he answered, looking me straight in the face, "you won't be defeating justice, but aiding it."

"If that's how it seems to me when you've explained what I saw last night, Mr. Barras," I said, "I will give you my word of honour with pleasure."

"That's all right," he said, "and I think I know enough about you to be able to trust you, and in a way I've got to, you see, because if you told anybody you'd met Tom Barras, coachman to Captain D——, disguised as a hansom cabman, you might interfere with the plans of the British Government."

I didn't see what the British Government could have to do with a member of our club driving about disguised as a cabman, but I thought I'd let him do the talking, and said nothing.

And then bit by bit he told me a story that I could never have imagined was possible at our very doors, so to speak, but was every word of it true, as was proved by what happened afterwards, when the newspapers were full of it, and Tom Barras and his governor, as he called the Captain, had played their parts in the great life drama and the green curtain had been rung down that hid them from sight for ever.

It is only because they are both dead that I feel free to reveal the secret that I learned that day,

and even now I do it with a nervous feeling that I can't shake off; and even while I am writing, though it is broad sunlight, and my good little wife is dancing our youngest on her knee in the next room and singing "Banbury Cross" to him as merry as a cricket, I feel as though a dim shadow stood behind me with an uplifted knife, and I shudder as one does when a breath from the unseen world comes on the back of your neck, which the old women say is someone walking over your grave.

"Last night," said Tom Barras, "when you saw me, I was driving a hansom cab because it was the best way I could follow two men I was shadowing. One man was my governor, the Captain, and the other was one of the most dangerous men in Europe. The house they had just left has been taken by men who have been sent to this country to commit a terrible outrage. In that house last night a plan was laid which, if it were carried out, would blow up one of the great public buildings of London and hurl scores of innocent people to eternity."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "you're not going to tell me that the Captain is leagued with those awful men who throw bombs and infernal machines! If that is your secret I am not bound to keep it, and I won't. I should be an accomplice."

"Steady a minute!" said Tom Barras. "If my governor was one of that lot I shouldn't have come

to you with the news. My governor is one of them because that's his business. He's one of them not to help them, but to take care they don't bring their infernal conspiracies off."

I began to understand then. "You mean that he is an informer—a spy?" I said.

"Yes, if you like to put it that way, but I prefer to put it another. The Captain is in the service of the British Government, and so am I."

"You!" I said; "aren't you a coachman?"

"Not exactly, though I can drive. I'll tell you who I am, and that will show you the necessity of doing as I tell you and keeping a silent tongue in your head. I am the Captain's brother, and we are both what you would call police agents. It is the Captain's business to be a member of this society, and advise the Government of all that is going on, and it is my business to follow him about everywhere to see that there is no treachery, and to give the alarm at the slightest appearance of danger."

"And that's how you got a hansom cab?"

"Exactly. Last night you saw me driving a cab; this afternoon I shall be driving the Captain in his brougham down to Ealing; to-morrow I may be driving a donkey in a flower-barrow, and knocking at the door of a house, and hollering up at the windows trying to sell my plants. Wherever the Captain goes I've got to be handy because he carries his life in his hand, and if he were seen making the slightest communication with the police,

or if he were followed by detectives who didn't know their work, and so betrayed their errand, he would be a dead man within sixty seconds."

"And the club?" I said, my heart coming up into my mouth at the idea of any of our fellows in that cosy, old-fashioned English room being mixed up with bombs and infernal machines and horrors of that sort. "Why do you come there? There's nobody to spy on there, I hope?"

"No," he said, with a queer sort of a laugh, "there's nobody there, but I've picked up London coachmen and their ways there, and I always like to look the character I'm playing and speak like it, and being introduced——"

"By the Irish M.P.'s valet!" I said suddenly. "Ah, I see you're getting something out of *him* eh?"

Tom Barras shook his head. "Don't jump to conclusions, Mr. Wynterdyke," he said quite gravely.

I was silent for a moment, feeling weighed down by the awful things I'd learned. Then I turned to him and said suddenly, as an idea came into my mind, "What you've told me I could use, you know, if I was so minded. Do you think you are wise to have done it?"

"Yes," he answered, "it was the best thing I could do. If I'd told you a cock-and-bull story you mightn't have believed me, and I couldn't have shut your mouth. You'd have told somebody about my

being disguised as a cabman, and the gang would have got hold of it, and the game would have been up. I've told you because I had to, and because I can trust you never to betray the secret, for if you do you may be the means of preventing a gang of desperate men, who intend to murder scores of your fellow-creatures—and one man of whom all England is proud among them—being brought to justice, and their wicked plot frustrated."

"I understand," I said, "and you may rely on my keeping my word."

"I trust you," he said, "and remember that at the club there must be no sign between you and me. You must treat me just as you always have done. And now I must get back. I've got to drive the governor over to Ealing. My niece is bad again, and he has to meet the doctor that he has called in to her."

He held out his hand and gave mine a hearty grip, and left me standing like a man in a dream.

When I went back to the stables, I felt like a man who had suddenly dropped through a coal-hole on a bright afternoon, and found himself in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors.

The missus had the dinner ready when I got back. But though it was my favourite dish—a real old-fashioned country toad-in-the-hole—I could hardly swallow a bit, and when one of the lads in the yard below cracked a new whip to try it, the crack made me jump out of my chair as if

I'd been shot, and for a second I thought it was a bomb gone off.

My wife dropped the dish of potatoes she was handing me and gasped out, "Good gracious, John, whatever's the matter with you?"

And I said, "I've just remembered that I was to have gone round for orders half an hour ago," and I put on my hat and rushed out.

I wanted to be in the fresh air alone with the dreadful thoughts that were surging through my head, and making me feel like a man that had woke up suddenly on his back with the nightmare.

* * * * * *

It was about three weeks after that that I met Tom Barras accidentally in the street. I hadn't seen him at the club at all since he had told me his secret. He was hurrying along looking very queer and ill.

I stopped to talk to him a minute, and he told me he was terribly upset. The men had been arrested the previous night, all but one, and his governor ought to have cleared out of the country at once for fear of any suspicion, but that the young lady had been taken terribly ill and was dying, and her father wouldn't leave her side.

"My poor brother is like a madman," said Mr. Barras. "If his girl dies it will break his heart. But his stopping here is dangerous. The members of the gang who are still at large may get an idea of who the traitor is at any moment."

"And then?"

"Well, in case they do, I'll say good-bye now, for we shall never meet again. But remember, no matter what comes out at the trial, while I and my brother live your lips are sealed."

"As the grave," I said, and then with a hurried nod he was off and away.

Two mornings afterwards I picked up the paper to read it at breakfast time, and looked at the sporting news and then the police cases, half expecting to see the dynamite trial, and then I turned to the middle of the paper and gave a cry and dropped the paper on the floor.

My wife ran to me and said "What's the matter, John?"

"Oh, nothing," I said, "only it's such an awful thing!" and then I gave her the paper to read, and got up and went down into the stables for her not to see my face.

The story in the paper was that an American gentleman who lived at Ealing had gone out of his house late the previous evening to fetch the doctor to his daughter who was ill and had been taken suddenly for death.

As he came out of the front gate of the garden into the road, which was a deserted one, being in a lonely part of Ealing, a man had suddenly sprung out of the shadow, levelled a revolver at him, and shot him through the head. The coachman named Barras, who was in the house at the time,

rushed out, hearing the report, and was instantly fired at and struck in the chest. The coachman was still alive, but no hopes were entertained of his recovery.

"What makes the tragedy still more terrible," said the newspaper, "is that the poor young lady died a few hours afterwards, and the unhappy wife of Captain D——, who is understood to have been an American over here in connection with a patent, is in a state bordering on insanity, so terribly has her mind been unhinged by the shock."

The evening paper announced that the coachman had died early in the day without being able to make any statement, and that the affair was still shrouded in mystery, no clue having been obtained as to the assassin, but it added, "The police are very reticent, and an officer from Scotland Yard has, it is understood, been down and taken possession of the dead gentleman's papers."

When I read that I knew it was no good my going to the police. The authorities knew all that I could tell them, and why the Captain and his brother had been assassinated. But it never came out in evidence when the dynamitards were tried, and I concluded that it wasn't wanted to be known that the Government had its own spies among the members of the society, and it wasn't the sort of thing I cared to mix myself up in, not knowing but perhaps I might be treated to a bomb or an infernal machine myself.

But I have put the true story of the crime as it was revealed to me under such curious circumstances down in my papers, which some day may be published. When that time comes perhaps it won't matter so much, as all that sort of thing may be past and done with, and better days have dawned.

At any rate, in doing this I am not breaking my word of honour, for I only promised to keep Tom Barras's secret while he and the Captain lived, and it is now two years since they came to their dreadful fate. But from that day to this nothing has been heard—at any rate nothing has got into the papers—concerning the members of the gang who must have suspected the Captain and set out at once to assassinate him for having betrayed the members of the society. A spy is a spy all the world over, and Englishmen haven't much sympathy with that sort of thing. But I couldn't help feeling sorry for the Captain, who risked his life to stay with his dying daughter, and nothing will ever make me think harshly of poor Tom Barras.

XIV.—MRS. THIMBLEBY'S TROUBLE.

JACK THIMBLEBY was a man I never had much respect for, for he was a happy-go-lucky, come-day-go-day-God-send-Sunday sort of a fellow.

We knew Thimbleby first through him and his wife living in our mews, he being coachman to a City gentleman, a widower with no family, who was regular in his habits, having the brougham to take him to the City at nine in the morning, and the brougham to fetch him from the City at six p.m. and drive him to his club, where he dined, and leave him there. For years Thimbleby told me that had been going on regular without alteration, except for six weeks in the autumn when his governor went away and didn't have anything out at all.

I suppose it was knowing his work so long beforehand, and its being so regular, that first got Thimbleby into his easy way of taking things and never troubling. It was a good place, you see, and an easy place. Only a brougham and a pair, no night work, and no Sunday work, and no shopping or hanging about in bad weather, like you have when there are ladies in the family.

He got back from the City at ten in the morning, and having a strapper—which is what we call

an odd man that does work for different stables in a mews—allowed him, he had, as you may say, all day to himself till five o'clock, when he had to put on his livery and get up on the box and go to the City again.

The best part of the morning he'd loaf about the yard with his pipe in his mouth gossiping and talking to one and another, and after dinner at one o'clock he'd dress himself up and go out, and the same thing of an evening after he'd had his tea, and a good many of his evenings he'd spend at the club, which he'd been made a member of through my introduction.

I didn't have to wait till he was a member of the club to find out what his weakness was, because it was known to everybody in the mews. Jack Thimbleby was a man who was always betting. Against a bet now and then on a big race I've got nothing to say, because, after all, horses are a coachman's business, and it's only natural that horsey men should have what is called a love of sport.

But Thimbleby was one of those men who must have their shillings or their half-crowns on something nearly every day, and who go in for doubles and trebles and accumulators (called "cumes," I believe), and who lose half their wages, and sometimes the whole lot, and get into debt as well, through listening to a lot of racing talk and going to public-houses where there is a little bookmaker or two always handy.

Mrs. Thimbleby told my wife first about the way Jack went on one day that she'd been at our house to tea. She let out to my missus that Thimbleby hadn't a shilling put by, but that he'd lost such a lot with his shillings and his half-crowns on this and on that and on the other that he'd had to borrow money, and had got it of a loan office or something of the sort. One day she'd found a letter in his pocket on blue paper, saying that unless an instalment was paid before twelve o'clock the next day the whole amount would come due, and proceedings would be taken without further notice.

She had nearly had a fit when she found it, having a horror of blue paper through having lived servant in a family where the master was always being served with writs, which followed the blue papers, and she having always to say he wasn't at home when he was, and about once every month having a rough fellow smoking his pipe in the kitchen and having to give him his meals and be agreeable to him because he was the man in possession.

She told my wife that this was her trouble, that perhaps one day when Jack was out a man would walk in and sit down and say he'd come to stop there till Jack paid the amount and costs, "and whatever I shall do, my dear, with one of them dreadful creatures and us with only our two rooms I don't know, for as to ever having enough to pay

one out Jack never will, for his next week's money's always gone before he takes this, and if it wasn't for what I make extra myself going out helping where there's a party on now and then I don't know what we should do."

She was very good at waiting at table and helping in the house was Mrs. Thimbleby, who had been in good places, and was a trained servant, and through some of her old employers often got an afternoon or an evening's work that way and was well paid. But of course it wasn't often enough to add very much to their income.

When my wife told me I said I didn't think Thimbleby would be such a fool as to let the brokers be put in his two rooms, even if he'd got enough in them to make it worth while, and that if he owed money the people he owed it to were much more likely to county-court him, and the judge would make an order for so many shillings a month, and when I saw Mrs. Thimbleby was in such a state I told her the same.

"Oh, but," she said, "I'm sure that's what the blue papers mean. I told Jack so and he didn't deny it."

"How much is it he owes?" I said.

"Ten pounds," said poor Mrs. Thimbleby. "He says if I don't let him have it out of my savings put away in the Post Office I must put up with the consequences."

"Well," I said, "of course it isn't nice for you

seeing that Jack throws everything he gets away on horseracing, to let him have your hard-earned savings, but perhaps it would be better to pay the debt and get rid of the worry."

"Not me!" she said. "If I once begin that he'll have every penny I've got, and it's over fifty pounds, and I want it to stop in the bank for a rainy day."

A night or two later I met Thimbleby at the club, and he happening to say he'd backed nothing but losers and was in a tight corner, and likely to get into hot water if he didn't get a tenner somehow, I let him know that his wife was worrying.

He grinned and said, "She's a foolish little woman. What's the good of worrying? I never do. I suppose I shall have a judgment summons and be committed to Holloway, but that won't matter for a bit because the governor's six weeks' holiday begins next week, and the missus can see to the horses all right, and perhaps you'll let one of your chaps lend her a hand."

I thought that was taking it pretty coolly, so I said, "Oh, it's Holloway you expect, is it? Your wife told me she thought they'd put the bailiffs in. She's afraid of a man in possession."

"Oh!" he said, "she is, is she?" And then he smoked his pipe, and seemed lost in thought.

It must have been about a week afterwards that a big burly chap, with a dirty clay pipe and a big stick, came down the mews, and went and knocked

at the Thimblebys' door. Thimbleby came down and let him in, and presently he (Thimbleby) came out as cool as a cucumber with his hat on, and passing me in the yard said, "Here's a lark—there's a man in possession at my place. He's made himself comfortable on the sofa, and he's told the missus to get him a pork chop and pickled onions for his dinner, and she's got hysterics. I'm off. Home ain't no place for me now." And with that he marched off as jauntily as you please.

He'd hardly been gone five minutes before Mrs. Thimbleby comes across to our place, her eyes red and her chest heaving, and she falls on my missus's neck and begins sobbing and gurgling.

"Oh, Mrs. Wynterdyke," she gasps, "whatever shall I do? There's a wretch of a fellow in possession, and he wants £10 and 15s. expenses, and he says he can't leave the place till he gets it, and Jack's gone off for the day, and says I ain't to sit up for him, but I'm to make the wretch comfortable and fix up a bed for him on the sofa!"

"How dreadful!" said my wife.

"Dreadful!" says Mrs. Thimbleby, "it's a outrage! He's a-sitting on the easy chair tilting it backwards till it strains and creaks like the steamer as I once went to Boulong in when a hurricane came on, and he's smoking a nasty dirty clay pipe that gets down the back of my throat and makes my eyes water like chopping

onions for duck stuffing, and as if that wasn't bad enough, my dear, he's cross-eyed, and the more he tries not to look at me the more it seems as if he was starin' at me owdacious. If I'm to have that wretch opposite me for the rest of my life I shall go stark staring mad, and the end of me will be a strait weskit!"

"But he won't stop there for ever, that's nonsense!" I said. "If he isn't paid out in a certain time he'll go and take your chairs and tables and everything else with him."

"Oh," she said with a big gasp, "is that what the end of it will be?"

"Yes," I said, "I suppose so."

With that she dropped down in a chair and put her apron up to her eyes, and began to rock herself to and fro and say that it would break her heart to see all her things carted away on a van, and her and poor Jack left with nothing but the bare boards to lie on and have to take the horse's clothing to put over them.

I comforted her and so did my wife as well as we could, and at last she saw that the only way, if she wanted to get rid of the man in possession instead of the furniture, was for her to pay him out of her Post-Office money; "and as that's what it will come to at the finish," I said, "I should do it at once and save the expenses and the nuisance."

She jumped up and dried her eyes and said she supposed that was the best thing to do. But she'd

have to give notice at the Post Office and it took three days. I could see her book if I liked—would I lend her the money till she could get her own out?

I knew it was all right and that she was an honest woman and would pay me, though I wouldn't have trusted Jack Thimbleby with the price of a pint. So I told the missus to get a couple of £5 notes out of her workbox, and put a sovereign to them, and handed the £11 to Mrs. Thimbleby, and she went back and paid the fellow and then gave him a bit of her mind and told him to be off.

When I went to the club that evening there was Jack as bold as brass, and as merry as a grig, smoking a big cigar. When he saw me come in he came and sat down by me and said, "Seen anything of our new lodger?" and I told him what had happened. He said it was very kind of me, and the missus was sure to pay me all right, because she'd got plenty of "oof" in the bank, but was that mean she wouldn't part with a bob to him, not even if he'd heard of a fifty to one chance and wanted to have a dash.

When shutting-up time came he'd had about as much as he could carry, and not wishing to see him make a fool of himself, I took hold of his arm and made him come home with me for his poor wife's sake.

Mrs. Thimbleby paid me the eleven pounds

directly she'd got her money out of the Post Office, and Jack Thimbleby went on "backing 'em" as though nothing had happened, instead of its being a lesson to him for life.

It was a little over a fortnight after Mrs. Thimbleby repaid me the money that, going round to the governor's for orders one morning, who should I meet coming towards the stables but the man with the dirty clay and the big stick? I stared at him and wondered who the dickens he could be after this time. When I came back the first person I met rushing out of the yard was Thimbleby, and Mrs. Thimbleby was standing at the door of the stables, shaking her fist at him, and calling him a good-for-nothing wretch, and wishing she'd been in her grave before she set eyes on such a vagabond.

He was gone round the corner in no time, and then Mrs. Thimbleby rushed up to me, her face flaming, and she said, "He's here again!" "Who?" I said. "The man in possession," she screamed, "and this time it's fifteen pounds. Oh—oh—oh—what shall I do?" She began to scream and wring her hands, so I said, "Here, don't make a noise outside, you don't want everybody to know your business—come up and see the missus and you can tell me all about it upstairs."

She came, and as soon as she could get her breath, being hysterical, she told us that the man was sitting on her sofa again smoking like a fur-

nace and cross-eyeder than ever, and it was all her work to keep from seizing the fire-irons and hitting him over the head with them. It seems directly she'd paid that eleven pounds Thimbleby had been to the same loan office and borrowed fifteen, and they let him have it, having found out that the money was paid directly a man was put in.

She asked me to help her and I said I would, and so I went in to her place with her, and I said to the man who was spitting all over the poor woman's hearth that was as clean as a new pin, "Where is your warrant for this?" I said. "What's that to you?" he said.

"It isn't anything to me, but it's everything to this lady," I said. "She wants to see it and she has a right to."

"No, she hasn't," he said, "this place is her husband's property."

She was going to bridle up at that, but I stopped her and said, "Leave this to me, Mrs. Thimbleby, ma'am. Now," I said, "what's the name of the loan office that's lent the money?"

"Look here," says the impudent wretch, probably looking me straight in the face, because his eyes were squinting out of the window, "I'm not going to discuss Mr. Thimbleby's private affairs with a stranger—if you want any information ask him. I'm in for fifteen pounds, and with the expenses it comes to sixteen ten six. If you're so

anxious to help the missus here, the best thing you can do is hand over the brass and I'll go."

"Not me," I said, "and if Mrs. Thimbleby takes my advice she won't either."

"No, you can take your oath of that," she said, stamping her foot; "I'm going to pack up now and go to my sister's, and Thimbleby and this fellow can have the place to themselves."

"Very sorry, ma'am," says the fellow, with a leer, "but I can't allow no boxes removed. Everything here belongs to me by order of the Court till the amount of the debt is paid."

"What!" she screamed, "I ain't to take my own clothes?"

"No, ma'am. I can't prevent you going out in what you stands upright in, having no authority to take 'em off your back, and being too much of a lady's man to do it if I had; but no boxes, ma'am, *if* you please."

She was going to burst out again, and I do believe the poor woman would have flown at the man, but I held her back.

"Leave him to me, ma'am," I said, "and you must take my advice if you want me to help you. Don't attempt to touch a thing. I'll take the two horses out and stand them in my stalls—I've two vacant; then you can come over and stay at our place till Mr. Thimbleby comes back, and we can consult him. Come along, ma'am."

We went down together, and I led the horses out.

"You'd better take care," shouted the fellow down the stairs, "you're removing property."

"Yes, but not Mr. Thimbleby's property," I said. "These are his governor's horses."

I got them out and put them in my stables, and Mrs. Thimbleby went across to my place.

"Now, my man," I said, "you can smoke and spit and make yourself as objectionable as you like, but you won't get anything to eat, because Mrs. Thimbleby isn't bound to provide it, you know. Mr. Thimbleby will be back about midnight, I expect, so I hope you'll last till then."

"I shall go out and get my dinner," he says, as bold as brass.

"All right," I said, "you can if you like, of course, but if you do I shall advise Mrs. Thimbleby to lock up the place, and you won't get in again, and if Thimbleby isn't a fool, now the horses are out, he won't either."

He cursed and swore at me, but I didn't take any notice, but locked the stable door and went across home, and Mrs. Thimbleby had dinner with me and the missus.

I knew Thimbleby's game was to stop away as long as possible and keep out of it, and I had an idea that there was something not quite legal in the fellow not showing his warrant or order.

About five o'clock I was in the yard, and the fellow came to the window and called down to me.

"Look here," he said, "you'd better advise Mrs. Thimbleby to pay me up like she did before. I'll go away for half, say—eight quid—and say that she'll guarantee the rest by instalments paid at the office."

"Oh," I said, "you're getting hungry, I suppose; but I shan't advise Mrs. Thimbleby to pay a shilling; and if Thimbleby's wise he'll leave you there all the time, as the law says you must stay before you seize the goods."

"D——n it," says he, "you don't mean to say you'd be a party to me dying of starvation."

"Show me your warrant," I said, "and I won't be a party to anything wrong; but I'm going to protect a helpless woman against a blackguard that smokes a clay pipe in an Englishman's castle and spits about a decent Englishwoman's floor."

"All right," he says, "you wait till Thimbleby comes back. He'll have something to say about your interfering with his private affairs."

"I'm not afraid of a dozen Thimblebys," I said, "and I'd advise you to shut the window—the fresh air'll give you an appetite." He shut the window with a bang.

I told Mrs. Thimbleby she could stay with us till Jack came back, and knowing he'd have to come to us, the door being locked, to get in, I spent a quiet evening at home with the ladies.

About twelve o'clock I heard talking in the yard and went out, and there was Thimbleby

hammering at his stable door, and the fellow looking out of window and telling him what had happened.

I went down quietly and stood inside my part of the yard, which was shut off by gates, so they couldn't see me, and I listened.

"What the devil shall I do?" said Thimbleby.

"Do?" says the fellow. "Go and get the key and let me out. Your old woman don't mean paying this time, and I'm hanged if I'm going to be shut up here any longer. I've got a gnawing in my inside that's awful."

"I'll get the key," he said, "and there's bread and cheese in the pantry."

"It's locked," he says, "and I daren't burst it open. I'm not going to get myself into a mess with the law, Jack, and the building's not your property, and if I damaged it that blessed interfering cove opposite, if he found out anything, might tell your governor and I might be summoned. And then I should get quodded for pretending to be a sheriff's officer. It might be six months."

That knocked me, so I forgot myself and said, "Well, I'm blowed!" out loud, and then both the conspiring villains gave a groan.

I undid the gates and came out then as they'd heard me, and then Thimbleby came to me and said, "Wynterdyke, you've heard too much—but for Heaven's sake don't give me away to the

missus!" "All right," I said, "on one condition. Let that impostor up there come down and take his hook, and promise never to show his ugly face again."

"Come down, Jim," said Thimbleby, "and Mr. Wynterdyke'll let you out."

I opened the stable door with the key, and the fellow made one dash outside, and then bolted as if a mad dog was after him.

"Now, Thimbleby," I said, "I'll go and fetch your wife and you can tell her you've settled with the man yourself and paid the money, but don't play the game again, or as sure as my name's John Wynterdyke, I'll round on you."

He did as I told him, and Mrs. Thimbleby went into her own place, believing every word he told her, only she had the sense to tell him that if ever he went to the loan office again, and a man came into her house, she'd apply to the magistrate for a judicial separation, and he could live in the bare rooms by himself.

He confessed the whole truth to me afterwards because I made him. The man in possession was a plant from the first. It was a pal of his he'd promised to give a bit to if he'd play the game for him. The artful humbug knew that his wife could never stand a strange man in their two rooms with her as long as she'd got a shilling to bless herself with, and having got the ten pounds out of her that he *did* once by the dodge, he played it again to get

another fifteen out of her. And if it hadn't been for me guessing something was wrong and doing as I did, he'd have planted that fellow on the poor woman until every shilling that she had in the Post Office had gone into his pocket and been lost on those "street corner tips" that give the bookmakers carriages and pairs and diamond studs, and leave the little punters without a coat to their backs.

* * * * * *

I wrote this memoir a long time ago, but I take it out of the drawer again to add that Jack Thimbleby has left off betting. He told me the other day "he'd turned it up for good." He would have gone on losing for ever I dare say, but what stopped him betting was having a big win. He backed Victor Wild for the Jubilee for every shilling he could get together and won fifty pounds of a little bookmaker who used to do business down a cab mews on the quiet.

When Jack went for his money there was half the neighbourhood blocking the place up, but there wasn't any bookmaker. Victor Wild had broke him, and nobody ever got a farthing of their winnings, or their stakes back either.

That settled Jack Thimbleby for dead certs. One had come off!

XV.—A TRAGEDY.

How Eli Tutts got the name of Tiny first I don't know, but Tiny Tutts he was to everybody, and it was only by once seeing him write his name across a receipt stamp that I knew his real name was Eli. When I knew that I guessed that, Eli not being exactly the sort of Christian name for a coachman to go about town with, his pals had put up a nick-name for him and had called him Tiny, because he was about the finest specimen of a coachman I ever saw on the box, not being stout or gawky, but what the ladies call a fine figure of a man, with broad shoulders and a big round honest English face that it was like a good wash after a hard day's work to look at.

Tiny Tutts was well known to the fellows at the club and to most West End coachmen, having been with the best families ever since he went into a stable, but we lost sight of him for two or three years because he got a place as English coachman in a French family in Paris, being tempted to go by the good money offered him, and thinking it was a chance to see a bit of life on the "Continong," as they say in the comic songs, and perhaps learn something.

We were all surprised one evening after he'd

been away over three years to see him walk in with "What cheer, boys?" in his jolly way, and to hear him say that he was going to join the club again.

He was as English as ever in appearance, but we soon found that he'd picked up a lot of foreign ways and expressions, which was, of course, only natural, and it made some of our fellows who hadn't travelled stare to see good old John Bull Tiny Tutts ordering a cup of coffee with no milk in it, and drinking it black with neat brandy in a glass almost as big as you'd expect to be sold for a doll's house.

He'd only come back, it seems, the day before, and hadn't dropped into his English ways yet, so he kept on calling the waiter "Garçon," and when he did it first the landlord who was in the room looked round and said, "Gas on?—why, it's full on!" not knowing what he meant; and when Mr. Hutchins gave him a light for his cigar he said "Merci," and Mr. Hutchins who happened to be looking round at the time, wondering where a draught on the back of his neck came from, gave quite a start, and said, "Good heavens! I haven't burnt your nose, have I?"

He told us a lot about Paris and the way of living there, and the queer ways the French have, and what awful drivers the French cabbies and coachmen are, and how they drive on the wrong side of the road and all over the place, and think no

more of running into each other or over a foot-passenger than we should of taking a corner a bit too sharp and scraping a wheel on the kerb.

But he told us it was a lot gayer over there than it was here, and light and bright and merry in the streets—or bullyvards, as he called them—till long after midnight, and always something going on, and very different from our dark, dismal streets, which after seven o'clock in the evening are only places to get out of as quickly as you can if you don't want to get the hump, or feel as if you were walking about a churchyard where there were ghosts flitting up and down to get a bit of fresh air unobserved before they went back to their tombs again.

It was fine, he said, to sit outside a café of an evening when your work was done, in a comfortable chair, and have a quiet drink and smoke and chat with a pal, and the people passing to and fro by you on the pavement and taking no notice, and a lot better for a man than sitting in a close hot room for hours choked with tobacco smoke and suffocated by gas.

The landlord was in the room when Tiny said that, and it made him a bit shirty, feeling it like a personal reflection on his establishment, so to speak. He gave a grunt, and said in a sneering sort of way, "Humph!—if you were so jolly well off in Paris what the doose did you come back to London for?"

Tiny took his cigar out of his mouth, blew the smoke down his nose (a foreign habit, I suppose), and said quietly, "Well, governor, that's my business, but if you particularly want to know what brought me back to my native land, it was a tragedy."

There was a look on Tiny Tutts' face that told us as plain as words could speak that he wasn't saying that lightly, but was thinking of something sad and terrible.

The landlord said "Oh!" his manner changing in a minute, for he was a real good sort, only touchy about his house, and never suffering a word to be said against it. And then, after a little pause he said, "What sort of a tragedy, might I ask—if it isn't a family secret?"

We were all ears in a minute, and Mr. Hutchins said, "I hope it isn't a painful matter for you, Mr. Tutts. If it is, as President of this honourable institooshion, I will call upon the members to change the subject."

"It *is* painful to me," said Mr. Tutts, "as it would be to any of you gentlemen as had a terrible visitation fall on an employer as had always behaved as a gentleman to you, and been a good and generous master. Some day I'll tell you all about it. But I've come here to meet old friends and enjoy myself to-night, so if you please, Mr. President, we'll talk about something else. What's your idea of the English horses for the Grand Prix,

Mr. Hutchins? The Frenchmen are putting the money down on Le Chouan as though the race was over and they were paying at the Parry Mutuels."

That started us on racing, and when our club started on racing everybody had something to say, and there wasn't much chance for anything else to get into the conversation.

* * * * * *

That night before he left Tiny Tutts gave us to understand that he was open for a job, and that if any of us heard of anything we might let him know, and he gave us his address. A day or two after it happened I heard where a good man was wanted, and knowing Tutts would just suit the job, I sent one of my lads round to him with a note, asking him, if he was in, if he'd come and see me.

He came round in about an hour, and I told him of the place, and that the coachbuilder had told me, and if he liked, as I was driving out for exercise, I'd put the pair in the phaeton and drive him over to the coachbuilder, who'd tell him all about it. He said he was very much obliged, and half an hour later Tutts was up beside me, and we were on our way.

I was a bit curious about Tiny's tragedy, and so I led the talk round to it, and he told me all about it.

"Ah," he said, "it was a terrible business, Wyn-

terdyke. Talk about life dramas and romances, well, I never thought as I should be in one. But I was—at least the family I was with was, and that's the same thing.

"My governor—the one that engaged me when he was over here staying with Baron ——, the French banker, for the Derby, was as fine and as handsome a man as you'd wish to see, and what I liked about him was that he was quite English in his style, like most of the real young French swells nowadays are, you know. If it wasn't for their talk you'd think some of 'em had just stepped across from Bond Street or Pall Mall.

"My governor was about five-and-twenty, and lived with his father and mother in the family mansion, which in Paris is called an hotel, with the family name after it. But, like lots of rich French swells, who don't marry till they've sown their wild oats, and feel like settling down and marrying to oblige their relatives, and to keep the estates or the fortune in the family, the Baron—he was called Baron Max to distinguish him from his father, who was M. le Baron de Kerouailles—had another establishment where he passed a good deal of his time. Everybody knew it, because they aren't so strait-laced as we are over here, and it was no secret from me, because I used to drive her and him almost everywhere.

"Quite the lady she was, and young and beautiful, but dark and high spirited, and had a way of

flashing her eyes and showing her teeth sometimes when not in a good temper that made me say to myself that it would be a bad day for my governor if ever those two were enemies instead of friends. Helen her name was, only in French it's Hélène, and that's what he called her, but the name she passed by at her apartments in the Champs Elysées was Madame Darien—but everybody knew her among his set as 'La belle Hélène.' She certainly was as fond of Baron Max as if she'd been his wife, and when I saw them so happy together, her beautiful and elegant and a lady every inch of her, and him a fine, handsome man, gay and charming as only a French gentleman can be—and I say it without disrespect to our own gentry and nobility, Wynterdyke, who have plenty of qualities that other nations don't possess—I used to hope that some day he'd marry her.

"But I didn't know what French fathers and mothers are, or I should have known better than that.

"Of course I didn't know anything beyond what I saw, never having made much headway with the language, except for what I wanted to eat and drink and the stable-talk, &c., so the other servants and me never had much to say to each other except to pass the time of day.

"But seeing what I saw afterwards and learning what I learnt, I put two and two together, and when it all got into the newspapers it was in

English in the *Galignani's Messenger*, which you can buy on the bullyvards, and so I knew all about it.

"He'd got to the age when he couldn't put off being married much longer, not according to the way French people look at it, and so his people, the Baron and the Baroness, they began to talk to him seriously, having found for him a young lady connected with the oldest nobility of France and arranged everything.

"Of course my governor, Baron Max, wasn't in love with this young lady, but that didn't matter."

"I should think it mattered a lot," I said, interrupting, but really more thinking it out loud to myself.

"Not in France," said Tutts; "there it seems the custom if you're of good family is to marry your wife first and fall in love with her afterwards if you can. It's what is called a marriage of convenience over there, I believe, and it don't work so badly as you'd think, for French husbands and wives get on—so far as anybody outside can tell—quite as well if not better than our folks do, and if they don't they keep their troubles quieter than is the custom here, and don't go washing their dirty linen all over the daily newspapers."

"Well, my governor must have seen it the way his people did, and made up his mind that he'd got to be off with Madame Darien and be married

and settled down, for his parents and the young lady's settled it with the lawyers, and he began to pay his court to his fiancée, and to be seen about with her and her mother at balls and receptions and the opera. Of course he ought to have gone honourably to the other poor girl who loved him and had lived with him, so to speak, for years, and told her first, but he was a weak man and he put it off, so that she found it out seeing the engagement announced in one of the newspapers.

"He hadn't been to see her for some time then, being at the château of his fiancée's father on a visit and making an excuse that he was in the country, but directly she saw that announcement she sent him a telegram saying he was to come to her at once or she would come to him.

"He knew that the fat was in the fire, as the vulgar saying is, and so he made an excuse to his fiancée, and came up to Paris and telegraphed for me to meet him at the station. I thought he looked very worried when he got into the brougham, but of course, I didn't know what it was then. It was about six o'clock when I met him. I drove him back to the Hotel de Kerouailles, and he ordered me again for nine o'clock, and dined at home that evening with his father and mother.

"At nine o'clock I was in the courtyard waiting, and a few minutes afterwards Baron Max came out and told me to drive to the Champs Elysées.

When he was inside he put his head out of the window and said, 'Madame Darien's.'

"When we got there he got out and said 'Wait.' I waited about half an hour, thinking things over to myself all the time, knowing of the governor's being engaged to be married, and wondering how la belle Hélène had taken it. I didn't think she looked the sort of woman to be put on one side without having something to say.

"Presently the door opened and the Baron came out, and with him Madame Darien herself. It came out afterwards that she had received his explanation quite quietly, and had said of course she supposed some day he would have to leave her, and he had thought it was all right, and she would be quite satisfied with the handsome settlement he proposed to make. Her maid, who knew all her mistress's affairs, had listened at the door, woman like, and heard everything. She told the judges that when they had settled everything Madame said she was going to the house of a friend near the Bois de Boulogne; would the Baron drive her there as he had his carriage at the door? The Baron said 'Certainly,' and that is how it was they came out together and got into the brougham.

"The Baron told me where to go, and explained in English—which he spoke very well—but it was a dark night and I'd never been there before, and it was a lonely sort of way, all avenues of trees and

very desolate at night, and only lights here and there.

"I drove on for some time, until I got to a part where it was quite dark and there wasn't a soul about, and then I heard a wild sort of cry from the brougham and pulled up as if I'd been shot. Instantly the carriage door opened. La belle Hélène jumped out and in a moment she had disappeared into the darkness. As she jumped a bottle fell to the ground and broke in pieces.

"For a moment I was like a man that had seen a spectre, but the groans inside the brougham were dreadful, so keeping hold of the reins I jumped down off the box and opened the door. I could see the Baron crouching in a corner with his handkerchief to his face, but it was evident he was in dreadful agony, for he was groaning and crying out.

"'What is it, sir?' I stammered, trembling from head to foot and going hot and cold; 'what is it, sir?'

"'Drive to the doctor's, quick—Dr. Bordier,' he said.

"I jumped up on the box, turned my horses' heads to Paris, and galloped as hard as I could till we got to the doctor that attended the family, who lived near the Madeleine. I drove into the big courtyard, and rang the bell so violently that the concierge came running out. 'Ouvrez! parlez!' I said, being all the French I could think of.

"The concierge opened the carriage door and started back. Baron Max gasped out something and then the concierge ran upstairs, and in a minute came back with the doctor. He and the concierge lifted the Baron out between them and carried him upstairs, for he seemed beside himself with agony and hardly able to move.

"Then the concierge came down and said something I didn't understand, and gave me a note. I looked at the address and saw it was to Le Baron de Kerouailles, so I knew I'd got to take it back to the governor's father, and I did.

"But how I got there I don't know, for I was dazed with horror. What I'd seen when they lifted the Baron out and the handkerchief fell from his hands was something I shall remember to the last day I live.

"La belle Hélene had flung a bottle of vitriol full into his eyes and face."

* * * * * *

I had half guessed, having read about such things, what Tutts was going to say, but when it came it was so horrible that I forgot for a moment what I was doing, and if it hadn't been for the horses who stopped and held back of their own accord I should have put my pole into the back of a Neville's bread van that was stopped just in front of me, the policeman having held up his hand to let the people cross the road.

"Good heavens!" I said: "how terrible!"

"Horrible ain't the word for it," said Tutts; "it was enough to turn your blood to water, and you'd have said so if you'd seen him as I did—once—afterwards——"

"But the woman—what did they do to her?" I said. "Did they catch her?"

"She didn't want any catching," said Tutts; "she went straight to the police and gave herself up.

"The Baron's people didn't want her punished because of the scandal, but of course they weren't able to stop it, but Baron Max couldn't appear at the trial. They saved his life, but he was a horror—something too dreadful to look at—something so hideous that his face had to be covered over with a silk handkerchief when he went about, and he was quite blind.

"La belle Hélène was tried and I had to give evidence, and so did her maid and the police. The Commissaire who was at the station when she came to give herself up said that she told him what she'd done, and that as she flung the vitriol in his face she said, 'Now you can go to this woman and see if she will have you!'

"Of course it was mad jealousy, and they tried to make out that she was mad, and her being so beautiful and breaking down when it came to his terrible state being spoken about and sobbing out in the dock that she loved him, and would have given her life for him, but that it had over-

balanced her reason to think he had deserted her after all those years and was going to make another woman his wife, made a great effect on the jury. They brought her in guilty with extenuating circumstances, and she had a much lighter sentence than such a dreadful deed as that had made everybody think that she would get."

"And Baron Max?"

"Better he had been killed than to live to be the dreadful thing he is. He is with his poor old father and mother at their country place, but there has to be an attendant always with him to watch him, to keep him from committing suicide, for that is what they are afraid he will do one of these days.

"Of course I wasn't wanted any more, the poor old gentleman having his own coachman, so they sent for me and made me a handsome present, and promised me the best of characters if I wanted one. But I'd had enough of Paris and French ways, and I got a bit of the home sickness for good old England and dirty old London, and so I made up my mind to come back and go into service with an English family again."

"Well, Tutts," I said, as I pulled up in front of the coachbuilder's, "here we are, and I fancy Mr. Arnold, the manager, has got just the very thing to suit you. I believe they are an elderly couple, and it will be what's called a quiet place, but——"

"Ah!" said Tutts, not waiting for me to finish, "I can do with a quiet place for a change—I've had enough of love dramas, and romances, and tragedies to last me for the rest of my life, and a bit longer!"

And I thought so too.

Tiny Tutts' story has quite put me off ever wanting to go to Paris as English coachman, even if it was to drive the President of the French Republic.

XVI.—A FUNNY OLD GENTLEMAN.

THAT was what Ted Wonnacott always called his governor whenever he spoke about him, and hearing him say it so often it got into a regular thing at the club whenever we saw Ted to say to him, "Well, and how's the funny old gentleman?"

It began by Wonnacott saying one night, being asked how he was getting on now his governor had retired and given up business, "Oh, all right—but he's a funny old gentleman."

And certainly, if all Ted told us from time to time was true, there wasn't much doubt about the description being true.

Old Mr. Clutterbuck was well known in what is called commercial circles for many years, and was counted as smart a business man as you could find, having built a small drapery business up into one of the leading firms of the day, and being reckoned to be among the richest tradesmen in London. He had the rough of it, and his sons had the smooth of it, for by the time they were lads he had a grand house and horses and carriages and servants, and was able to send them to one of the great public schools to be educated, and allowed them plenty of pocket money, which was very different to the way *he* commenced life. He never made any secret of

how that was, always telling the story over again when he took the chair at the big annual dinner he gave his employés after stocktaking.

He came to London from Lancashire an orphan boy, tramping all the way except for a lift now and then in a cart, having run away from an aunt who was not quite right in her head. She got it into her poor disordered brain somehow that he was "a child of Satan," and that the only way to get the evil spirit out of him was to hit him on the head with anything that came handy—a stick, a saucepan, a fire shovel, or a rolling pin. He stood it for a long time, being quite friendless and out all day at a little draper's shop where he was errand boy, but when he lost his place because his master got five years for setting the shop on fire to get the insurance money and his aunt got worse and changed the stick and the saucepan for the chopper that was used for firewood, he made up his mind that he'd go to London, which—like all country boys—he thought was a town where everybody could begin to make a living directly they got there.

So he set out one morning, with his few things tied up in a handkerchief on the end of a stick, just as you can see to this day in the picture in old-fashioned story books, and arrived at last in the mighty metropolis, footsore and hungry, and the first night he lay down on a doorstep, and was taken up and brought before a magistrate for it,

and told his story; and a gentleman in court, who was a linendraper, hearing it, took him on as errand boy, liking his straightforward, honest, country way, and pitying him.

This was his beginning, and he was so smart and clever that by the time he was two-and-twenty everything was left to him to manage, and he married one of the young ladies in the shop, whose father came into money and left it to her soon afterwards when he died. Young Clutterbuck bought his old master's business and carried it on and improved it, and took in the next shops one after the other till he had a huge place and hundreds of assistants, and vans and horses going all over London and the suburbs, for he had done what the drapery trade has since done everywhere nearly—gone into other businesses—and would supply you with anything from a ready furnished mansion to a bunch of turnips—from a bundle of sprats to a wedding trousseau—from a box of matches to a marble monument over your family grave.

His two sons, Mr. William and Mr. Herbert, would be at the dinner, and Mr. Wonnacott told me they hated the old gentleman telling that story about his having tramped to London and slept on a doorstep, because they were great swells and in the business, and had their country houses and their hunters, and had married well and fancied themselves in society, and thought their father

might very well have dropped the story which he had told for forty years, and let it be forgotten.

Mr. Wonnacott was with the old gentleman for years before he retired. His wife had died some time before that happened and he had never been quite the same man since, but he always went to business and was about all over the place looking after everything in his old-fashioned way, although Mr. William and Mr. Herbert were there, and dozens of well-paid managers of departments and superintendents.

But he began to do odd things, his memory failing him, and he would sometimes fancy he was an assistant again and would go behind the drapery counter and serve, and say, "What is the next article?" though a millionaire, and that would make the sons almost raving mad, especially when some of their swell friends who knew them out of business came in and saw the old gentleman bowing and smiling behind the counter to someone who had come in for a yard of calico, with pins stuck about all over the front of his black frock-coat.

They didn't know what to do to stop it, because their father was still the senior partner and was very tetchy if either of them interfered with him, but they were put out of their misery by the old gentleman having a kind of stroke, and after that being affected in the brain—not exactly imbecile altogether, but very strange and peculiar—and then he was persuaded to retire and had a male

attendant to look after him, and be always with him, and only came to the business now and again, and then was taken into the private office at once and kept there till he was ready to go home again.

Mr. Wonnacott was quite in the confidence of the young gentlemen, he being an old servant, and had his instructions from them to listen to all the old gentleman had to say and not to take any notice of it. Old Mr. Clutterbuck was to have all the change he could, and so was taken about from place to place, never being allowed to stay long at his home, but not being able to walk well Mr. Wonnacott always had to go too, with a pair of horses and a single, a brougham and a victoria.

He soon made up his mind that his governor was mad, but he didn't tell anybody that, only remarking, when he couldn't resist telling us at the club of something that happened, that old Mr. Clutterbuck was a funny old gentleman.

Mr. Wonnacott was more friendly with me than he was with the others, because I and my missus used to go round to his place visiting, and he used to bring his missus to ours, they being the sort of people you could mix with without the wives quarrelling or scandalmongering, which is not always the case unfortunately, many coachmen's wives being inquisitive and gossiping. And that is how half the scandal gets about—the women talking over family matters they have heard from their husbands.

Through being so friendly, Wonnacott would tell me a good deal over a pipe and a glass that he wouldn't have told in the club before a mixed assembly, as the saying is.

The first time he really let me into the secret was when we were sitting together one summer evening in the harness-room smoking our cigars, having left the ladies to themselves while the missus put the children to bed, they being undressed in the sitting-room and their hair put in curl papers, etc.—which I daresay my fellow coachman will know all about if they are married men and the fathers of families.

That suited me when we were alone, for I loved to hear the young 'uns' prattle, and hear them say their prayers, and when they were in their little white nightgowns, washed and curled and ready for bed, the happiest moment of the day would be when they climbed up on to my knees, and put their little arms round my neck, and kissed me, and said, "Dood night, daddy. God bless 'oo," and I don't envy the father who has never had the feeling in his heart that always came into mine as my little ones kissed their "dannies" to me, being held up at the open door in their mother's arms. But as I daresay a good many of my readers aren't married men I won't say anything more about that, but return to the harness-room, where I left Mr. Wonnacott.

"Well, Ted," I said, "how are you getting on

now the old gentleman's out of business? I suppose he's quite got over the stroke by this time?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wonnacott, "so far as his general health is concerned you may put him down middling now, but—oh, John, he is funny."

"Funny?" I said; "how do you mean?"

"Why, he does such queer things, and does them so solemn and matter-of-fact that it almost takes your breath away till you remember that he's non compus, as my old grandfather as was a pensioned-off attendant at Bedlam Lunatic Asylum used to say, which means as the vulgar saying is 'off his chump.'"

"'Balmy,' I believe they call it now," I said, having spent an evening at a music-hall the week before, "but in my young days we used to call it being 'daft' and 'soft,' and among the gentry 'mentally afflicted.'"

"It doesn't matter what you call it," said Ted, "it comes to the same thing, and there's no mistake about my old governor having gone clean out of his mind. He isn't dangerous—he doesn't want to chuck himself out of windows, and he doesn't fancy he's a steam engine or a valuable china vase, as a nobleman I once heard of did, who had a wicker crate made to fit him all over that he walked about in all day and slept in all night for fear anything should knock up against him and break him. He hasn't got any crackpot ideas of that sort, and he doesn't think he's the King of England and go

about with a tin jelly mould on his head believing it to be the British crown, as my grandfather had a patient at Bedlam that did; but he *is* funny!"

"Well, what does he do?" I said, beginning to get curious.

"Well, I'll tell you what he does. He's got the idea that he's still in business, and he tries to sell every blessed thing in the place, and he doesn't recognise any of the people about him as servants, but fancies they're customers, and they have to pretend they are, and buy things and put them back again afterwards, because if they won't buy he sits down in a corner and groans and says business is going to the dogs and he'll have to move into cheaper premises."

"Go on!" I said; "how can he sell things—there's no stock?"

"He makes everything stock," said Ted. "He'll stand behind the dining-room table and sell the tablecloth and the hearthrug. He'll take the vases off the mantelpiece and try and sell them to the housemaid or the parlourmaid, and now they've got orders from the doctor to take the things after letting the old gentleman have a bit of difficulty in selling them, and then they say they'll take them—how much? Then the old gentleman says, 'Pay at the desk, please,' and calls out 'Cash!' and the attendant who valets him and goes about with him sits at a little davenport, and makes out bills on bits of paper and pretends to take the money.

Then the old gentleman chuckles and says, 'Business is improving; things are looking up, Mr. Johnson!' and the attendant says, 'Yes, if we go on like this we shall have to engage another assistant.' And the old gentleman says, 'No, I can manage. I don't want any of your new fangled jackanapes, all moustache and watch-chain—I can't abide 'em!'

"The first time I found out what was going on I thought I should have had a fit. I went in for orders, and there was the poor old governor standing staring at the old eight-day clock that stood on a bracket in the library.

"'Johnson,' he said, 'that clock has been in stock a long time—we ought to mark it at reduced figures.'

"I coughed to let him know I was in the room, and you might have knocked me down with a feather when he turned round and rubbed his hands and smiled, and made me a low bow and said, 'What can I have the pleasure of showing you this morning, sir? Did you happen to be wanting a cheap line in eight-day clocks? I have the very thing to suit you.'

"I couldn't answer for a minute, but the attendant he gave me a wink, and said, 'It's really a bargain, sir!' and I tumbled, as the saying is, and said that I might be able to do with one if it was reasonable.

"'You shall have this for—for—let me see—two nineteen!' He took it up and began to say what

a splendid timekeeper it was, and how solid the workmanship was, and as I hesitated, not knowing what to answer, he said 'Two fifteen,' and I said 'All right, sir,' and he handed it to me and said, 'Pay at the desk,' and the attendant said, 'Let me see, sir—you have an account—thank you. Allow me to take it to your carriage for you.'

"And he took the clock, and there was him and the old gentleman bowing me out as if I'd been a duke, and I backed out of the door with my mouth wide open and the attendant after me with the clock.

"In the hall he said, 'It's all right; take it down into the kitchen—the girls can put it back this evening.'

"When I got down into the kitchen with the clock the servants all began to laugh, and the cook said, 'Oh, you're a customer, are you, Mr. Wonnacott?' and they showed me the hearthrug, and an antimacassar, and the library fender, and even the teapot and the toast-rack that the governor had insisted on selling them that morning."

"Poor old gentleman," I said to Mr. Wonnacott. "But after all it's a delusion that makes him happy. It's much better than as I've seen some of them in an asylum I went through once, imagining that they had their mouth and nose filled with chaff and couldn't breathe, or sitting picking at nothing with their poor twitching fingers, and dying inch by inch of melancholy."

"Oh, yes," he said, "it's better than that, and really, if it wasn't that it's such a sad end for a man who has worked hard all his life and made a huge fortune, it would be amusing. But lately his non compus has taken a new turn."

"Oh," I said, "what's that?"

"Well, he's got into his head that his household is badly managed, and that he must make a clean sweep of everybody. So about once a week he sacks one or two of us—tells us to pack and go, and get our wages of the housekeeper, and never to let him see our faces again."

"And do you go?"

"Not likely! We say, 'Very well, sir,' and the next morning the attendant tells him he's advertised for new servants, and we come in and say we've heard he's in want of a cook or a housemaid or a coachman as the case may be, and he takes us on at once with a solemn warning, telling us why he dismissed those who had the places before. He's sacked me every Saturday for the last five weeks, and taken me on the next Monday morning as a new hand, and the housekeeper has to be in the room to say she's taken up our characters and they are quite satisfactory. Oh, he is a funny old gentleman and no mistake, but he's as mad as a March hare!"

I didn't see Mr. Wonnacott for some time after that—Sir Walter, my governor, and her ladyship going to the seaside, and me having to go, too,

with the horses. When I met him it was well on into the autumn, when I'd come up to town for a couple of days to see to some new loose boxes the governor was going to have put up.

I looked in at the club about nine o'clock in the evening, and there was hardly anybody there, it being the dead season, as the saying is, and most of the families out of town. But while I was having a cigar and talking to the landlord, who'd had a big tip for one of the autumn handicaps from a head lad as had a sister there a barmaid, Wonnacott came in, and soon after there was a bit of trouble in the bar, one of the swell mob having been caught playing the good old game known as "ringing the changes," and the landlord went out to see about it.

"Well, Ted," I said, as soon as we were alone, "and how's the funny old gentleman?"

Mr. Wonnacott shook his head. "Well, John," he said, "to tell you the honest truth, he's got a bit too funny for me, and I'm leaving as it might be to-morrow night."

"It's a pity to give up a good place," I said, "where there's no night work."

"Yes," said Mr. Wonnacott, "that's all very well, but he's gone dottier than ever, and now he thinks he's back at his first shop where they used to have the things stuck out all over the pavement. Nothing will satisfy him but he must have the front door —lucky the house is in its own grounds—blocked

up with things, chairs, tables, old bits of carpet, the Dutch oven, books and towels, etcetera, and the young governors have sent him some rolls of oil-cloth and some cotton prints, and a job lot of neck-ties in boxes, and me and the gardener have to stick 'em outside ranged all along the front of the house every morning. He's got it in his head I'm outside salesman, and so for an hour or two every day when I come for orders I have to stand outside and watch the goods and pretend to sell them to the passers-by, who of course are the servants and people about the place.

"It was bad enough feeling like a kid playing at 'pretending,' but now that I've got to be a salesman and talk gibberish about an old battered saucepan that the governor has marked on himself, 'Useful Christmas present—one and fourpence halfpenny,' and the tradespeople—the butcher's boy and the fishmonger and the postman, and people like that who have to come up to the house on business—get chipping us and have a game with us, it's more than human flesh and blood can stand.

"And I get chipped about the neighbourhood, too. The boys in the street call after me. Why, it's only this morning, as I was going back to the stable after being outside salesman for an hour and a half, that a little imp of a boy, not more than seven, comes up to me as bold as brass and says, 'I say, young man,' he says, 'have you a cheap line

in frying-pans as would do for me to give my grandmother as a wedding present?'

"Of course, it had got about through the butcher's boy and such like, but the doctors say that if the old gentleman isn't humoured it may turn to violence, and perhaps something that would make him have to be taken to an asylum, and the young Mr. Clutterbucks are anxious to avoid the scandal of that.

"But it isn't good enough for me—I wasn't engaged for a private lunatic asylum or to sell frying-pans at an alarming sacrifice, and so I'm going to turn it up. If I don't I shall go balmy myself."

* * * * * *

Mr. Wonnacott left and got another place very soon afterwards, and as it was in town I saw a good deal of him still, and we generally had a crack together about the funny old gentleman. He is still alive; but whether he still has the same delusions or different ones I can't say, as he hasn't been seen about in his carriage for a long time past, and it is said has got so eccentric that the young Mr. Clutterbucks won't let him be taken outside his own grounds. They don't like the idea of their old father when he is out in the carriage and it stops for a minute taking off his hat and other articles of attire and trying to sell them cheap to anybody that may be passing by.

XVII.—DICK PLUCKROSE'S COINCIDENCE.

WE were talking about coincidences at the club one evening. There was a case on in the newspapers that everybody was talking about, and it was that that brought the question up. It was the case of a clergyman who in the pulpit in the course of his sermon confessed that thirty years ago, when he was a boy, he accidentally set fire to a hayrick while smoking a surreptitious pipe as a schoolboy, the day before they broke up for the holidays. He had not had the courage to confess it, but ran away as fast as he could, and the next day had gone home. He was illustrating moral cowardice, as he called it, in his sermon, and that was one of his illustrations. He told the congregation where the school was, and he said that burning hayrick had been on his conscience for years.

When the service was over a man came to the vestry and asked to see him. "I beg pardon, sir," said the man, "but if you set fire to that hayrick I shall be glad if you'll have it published in the newspapers. Thirty years ago I was a farm hand at that place, and I'd had the sack, and I'd

been heard to say I'd have my revenge on my employer, the farmer that rick belonged to. On that very day I was asleep on the other side of that rick, and I never woke up till it was in flames. I ran round, smelling the smoke, and tried to pull some of the hay away to stop the fire spreading, and while I was doing it some men came hurrying up and saw me. I was charged with doing it, sir, and the words I'd said about revenge were brought against me, and I got six months' imprisonment."

That was a remarkable coincidence, the man who had suffered for that hayrick being in the very church—hundreds of miles away from the place where it was set on fire—on the very day that the clergyman confessed to his accident. Being a boy and having gone back to London to his home for his holidays, and that being his last term at that school, the clergyman, of course, not reading the local papers, never knew what had happened, and yet here, after thirty years, was the truth made clear and an innocent man's character righted.

It was just the sort of story to set our members talking, and telling cases that they knew themselves of coincidences.

One of our members, Mr. Gaskin, who was coachman to Mr. Justice ——, a judge who was supposed to be one of the severest on the bench, told us a wonderful story about his governor, and

a coincidence that really was hardly to be believed. But from inquiries I made afterwards I found it was quite true, and had been told as a remarkable incident in his career by Mr. Justice —— himself.

It all happened in one month, which made it so extraordinary.

He had sentenced two men and a woman to death at the Old Bailey. It was a most awe-inspiring scene, the verdict not having been delivered until nearly midnight, and sentence being pronounced as the clock was striking twelve in a court dimly illuminated by wax candles, something being wrong with the gas.

There was a great dispute as to the young woman's guilt; but she had been the mistress of the man who, with his brother, had starved and ill-treated his wife to death.

Mr. Justice —— sentenced the three to death, and the young woman was carried out of the dock fainting; but two days afterwards, by order of the Home Secretary, the sentence was squashed —I believe that is the legal term—and the young woman was absolutely freed, the two men being reprieved and their sentence being altered to imprisonment for life.

Most people will remember the case, but I won't mention names, as Mr. Gaskin is still with Mr. Justice ——, and it might get him into trouble with his governor, who wouldn't like what his coachman said about him to get into print.

A week or two afterwards, on circuit, Mr. Justice —— sentenced two men to twenty years' penal servitude for a burglary accompanied by violence, which was nearly manslaughter; and a week after that he gave a man and his wife seven years for chloroforming a jeweller's assistant and robbing him of a lot of precious stones.

The two men some weeks afterwards were released, the real criminal having confessed, and the wife in the jewel case had a free pardon, evidence having been brought to the Home Secretary that she was under the influence of her husband, and had no idea what she was going to do.

When Mr. Gaskin had told us about these cases, Mr. Hutchins said, "Where's the coincidence?—in their being released?"

"No," said Mr. Gaskin, "though, of course, that is one, but this is where the coincidence really comes in. About a year after these cases had been before him my governor was travelling abroad—it being vacation—and he got to a French seaport town. In the hotel he met a barrister he knew, and the barrister asked him to come with him to see what the 'music-halls' were like, which were being talked about a good deal in the papers then, because English girls sang in them, and were not always well treated. Mr. Justice —— said 'All right!' and they went incognito, as the saying is. They didn't stop long, the place being full of English sailors and

young fellows 'seeing life,' but as they got up to come out, they passed a bar behind which a young woman was serving, and over her head was printed, 'English spoken.'

"As Mr. Justice —— passed the bar, the young woman smiled at him and nodded, and Mr. Justice —— stopped, wondering if she had recognised him. 'Do you know me?' he said. 'Well, I ought to,' said the girl in a low voice. 'Don't you remember sentencing me to death last year? My name is——'

"It wasn't long before my governor was out in the fresh air after that, and it must almost have taken his breath away. Well, he came back to England, and one day, being in Manchester, he went into a place to be shaved, not having his valet with him and not shaving himself.

"The young man who shaved him was very quiet for a time, but presently he said, 'You don't remember me, sir?' My governor looked at him, and said, 'No, I don't.' 'Ah," said the young fellow, 'of course you see so many faces, but I thought perhaps you might have remembered me. It was only last year that you sentenced me to twenty years' penal servitude.'

"I guess when that barber's assistant said to my governor, 'Anything off the hair, sir?' he said 'No' pretty quick, and got out."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hutchins, "now that is wonderful, but you ain't going to tell me as he met the

other young woman—the one in the chloroform case?"

"Yes, he did," said Mr. Gaskin, banging his fist down on the table, and making the tumblers and the tankards jump, "and only a few days afterwards. He was travelling by train, and he got out at a station and saw a lady trying to open the door of a third-class carriage. He went to her assistance, undid the door, and helped her out. Her hand trembled so in his he thought something must be the matter, so he said kindly, 'Aren't you well?' 'Yes, sir,' she stammered, 'but it gave me such a turn seeing you!' 'Why?' he said, 'do you know me?' 'Oh, yes, sir,' she said, 'I am Mrs. ——, that you gave seven years to for that chloroform affair.' You see," said Mr. Gaskin, "that made three people who had all been sentenced by him and let out at once, and he'd met them all one after the other. That's what I call coincidence."

"Yes," said Mr. Simley, Lord Linstead's man, "so it is, and I quite believe every word, for after all it isn't a bit more wonderful than Dick Pluckrose's coincidence—is it, Dick?"

Mr. Pluckrose was a very quiet, nervous sort of man, and never had much to say at the club, and when his friend Mr. Simley drew public attention to him he turned quite hot and swallowed his smoke, and coughed for five minutes in his confusion.

He was a good-looking, gentlemanly man of about two-and-thirty, wonderfully neat and professional-looking, and we understood had had several places, but always good ones; but as he never talked about himself, being mostly a listener, and hadn't "palled in," so to speak, with any of us except Mr. Simley, who had introduced him as a member, we didn't know very much about him.

Mr. Hutchins said, "Silence for Mr. Pluckrose," which made him more confused than ever, and he swallowed more smoke, and Mr. Simley got up and slapped him on the back, and at last he left off coughing; but we could not induce him to tell us the story, and presently he got up and went out and didn't come back again.

But I wasn't going to lose Mr. Pluckrose's story, so I watched my opportunity till I got him early one evening by himself, and made myself agreeable, and at last I got it out of him.

"It certainly was very odd how it all happened," said Mr. Pluckrose, "and is a story quite as strange as any you read in the newspapers, but I didn't like to tell it before company because they'd go and talk about it, and I don't want to get myself mixed up in a court of law, waiting about the Old Bailey with witnesses, and perhaps my portrait in the *Evening News* and the *Star*—no, thank you.

"But I don't mind telling you, Mr. Wynterdyke, in a friendly way. I was a coachman some ten

years ago when I was quite a young fellow, only twenty-one, to a Mr. Walter Wolverton, who was a widower. He was about forty, but looked younger, and was the proprietor of a newspaper, and had plenty of money and nothing much to do.

"Being a newspaper proprietor he had lots of people come to see him who wanted things, and one day a very stylish and rather handsome young woman called upon him—the housekeeper, Mrs. Cripps, told me about it—and brought a lot of poetry with her and wanted his advice about how to get it published, and she must have got on his weak side, for he let her call again, and after that he called on her and I drove him in the brougham to her flat, and very soon afterwards she was by his side in the mail-phaeton he drove, and three months afterwards he went away, and one day, to my astonishment, when I went round to the house Mrs. Cripps said, 'Mr. Pluckrose, guess what's happened.' I never was good at guessing, so I gave it up, and then Mrs. Cripps said, 'He's married her, and they're coming back here in a fortnight!'

"Of course I knew who she meant, but I only said 'Oh!' because I was always one to keep my opinions to myself.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wolverton came back, and everything went on all right for six months, and then she didn't go out in the phaeton with him, but in the brougham by herself, and I had to drive her to

a solicitor's office pretty often. Mrs. Cripps told me the governor and the new missus weren't hitting it off exactly, and then there was trouble, and one day I drove her to Victoria Station with her luggage on a four-wheel cab, and she never came back, and Mrs. Cripps told me that the governor said they had separated on account of income-something-or-other of temper, and things would go on in the future as when he was a widower. But about six months after that she said she'd heard things—I expect she'd been at the governor's letters or papers—and there was no doubt that the young woman was an adventuress and had humbugged the governor, for she was a married woman with a husband who had bolted out of the country for something, and had passed herself off as single and bigamised the governor, only he wasn't going to take the trouble to go to law and advertise his private affairs, having got rid of her through finding the former marriage out.

"I stayed with Mr. Wolverton," said Mr. Pluckrose, "for three years, and then I left, as he went to live in the country, and I was courting at the time and my young lady was in London service, and I didn't want to go away.

"I was out of a berth for a month, and one day a friend of mine came round and said would I take a driving job where a coachman was ill? I said 'Yes, I didn't mind,' and I went to a house in Kensington to see the gentleman.

"It was a very pretty little house, and the gentleman was a good-looking military man of about thirty-three. He told me that he should only want 'me till his own coachman was well, and was I careful and had I a good character, and I answered satisfactorily, and he said I should be engaged, and told me where the stables were.

"The next day I went round for orders and was told to come with the brougham for the missus at eleven. I went, and the lady came out and got into the brougham. I didn't notice her as she got in, but when I pulled up at the place I was to drive to, and she got out, she said, 'Wait,' and our eyes met. She never moved a muscle, but I felt ready to drop off the box.

"It was Mrs. Walter Wolverton, only now she was the wife of Captain Margetson, for I ascertained afterwards that she had married him as a widow in her first husband's name that was abroad.

"The thing gave me such a turn that, not knowing whether to say anything or not, and feeling that it must make her very uncomfortable to be driven about by a servant who knew her secret, that evening I made an excuse to the captain and said that my father was seriously ill in the country and I had to go home; would he get somebody else? And I never went near the place again.

"Soon after that I got a good place with a gentleman at Hampstead, a fine old fellow of about

sixty-six, who must have been awfully clever, because he had a lot of letters F's and R's and G's after his name, and his house was filled with glass cases of bits of stone and coal and minerals and things he pottered about with all day—a Mr. Harvey Jarvis that perhaps you may have seen his name in the papers at swarrys and conversationies and other places.

"Being settled as it were in a good easy berth, and having a capital private stable in the grounds with comfortable living rooms, I thought I might as well get married, and when Mr. Harvey Jarvis went abroad with a scientific party to a place called Dolomites, or something of the sort, and I had plenty of time to myself, I went to church with my present wife—I told the governor before he went away all about it, and he behaved handsomely, though I'd only been with him a few months—and brought her back to her new home, and some day I hope, Mr. Wynterdyke, you and your wife will let me introduce you to Mrs. Pluckrose, who, though I say it that shouldn't, is one of the best that ever wore petticoats.

"Of course after we'd been married a bit several of my wife's friends came to see her, and I always made them welcome, for I know what female friends are to a woman, there being many things women like to talk to each other about that a man doesn't understand or doesn't take any interest in.

"One of the friends that came was Mrs. Pluck-

rose's cousin, who was in service, a lady's maid. When she came to tea we began talking about one thing and another, and gossip about families came up, which it will do as you know among ladies and gentlemen who have been in service, and Mrs. Pluckrose's cousin said she had a friend who was very clever, but was out of a situation suddenly through a very strange affair.

"Of course my wife, woman like, wanted to know all about it at once, and her cousin told her that the friend had been maid to a lady who had suddenly gone away from her home, and the next day the husband had given the maid a month's wages and sent her away.

"'And, my dear,' said Mrs. Pluckrose's cousin, 'it's turned out quite a romance. The gentleman had discovered through an anonymous letter that the lady he had married wasn't his wife, she having a husband alive!'

"I pricked up my ears at that. 'What was the gentleman's name?' I said.

"'Captain Margetson,' said Mrs. Pluckrose's cousin.

"I looked at my wife, and she looked at me, but we neither of us said a word, my wife being like me careful of her tongue, and having also promised me never to reveal what I had told her to anyone, as we didn't want to be dragged into the scandal when it came out.

"But when Mrs. Pluckrose's cousin had gone

my wife said, 'Well, Dick, what do you think of that?' 'Think, my dear,' I said; 'why, that it seems as if I was to be haunted by that bigamy woman all my life.'

"'Bigamy!' said my wife, 'she's more than that, she's a trigamy— I do believe, Dick, as she's a marrymaniac—but, however she can go on like it I can't think. I suppose she's found out the way to stop the poor gentlemen that marry her from bringing her upon the law courts. They don't want to let people know what fools they've been!'

"I said I supposed there must be something of that sort, and we let the matter drop.

"Mr. Harvey Jarvis had only gone away for a month, but it was three months before he came back, he having been taken ill, so we heard, in an hotel abroad, and having to stay there till he got quite well again. Soon after he got back we noticed a great change in him, and one day Mrs. Triggs, the housekeeper, who had been with him ever since his wife died, told my wife that she was going to leave. She said she didn't know why, but the old gentleman had behaved very handsomely, given her a cheque for a year's salary, and assured her he had no complaint.

"But before she left she found out why she was going. Mr. Harvey Jarvis was going to have a new lady housekeeper in her place, and she had heard it was a lady he had met abroad.

"A week after Mrs. Triggs left the new lady housekeeper arrived. I didn't see her, being out exercising when she came, but the maids told my wife they didn't like her, but they were sure she was as artful as a waggon-load of monkeys, and would twist the old gentleman round her little finger.

"The next morning I had to go into the house for orders, and the old gentleman was at breakfast, the new lady housekeeper being at the table with him pouring out the tea, etc.

"She turned towards the door as I went in, and how I ever found the voice to say 'Yes, sir,' when the governor said 'The brougham at twelve,' I don't know, for I felt as if I had been struck by lightning.

"The new lady housekeeper was the same person who had married Mr. Wolverton and Captain Margetson. She looked me full in the face as bold as brass, but I'd have sworn to her on the Bible before Her Majesty's judges.

"What was I to do? Being a nervous man I was afraid to denounce her to the governor, and it wasn't my place. But I couldn't stop there and drive that woman about, her knowing I knew. I should have had brain fever with the worry of it. So I gave a fortnight's notice, making some excuse, and I left, taking care not even to tell my wife.

"After a bit I got another situation—a good

one—in which, I am happy to say, I am at present, but I wasn't rid of that woman yet.

"About six months ago—I had been in my present place over three years—I was driving my people home from a theatre, and in the Strand a brougham in front of me stopped suddenly, and before I could pull up my pole was in the back panel.

"A gentleman in the brougham jumped out and my governor got out, and the end of it was my governor gave his name and address and the gentleman gave his.

"The next morning the governor said I had better go round and see what damage I had done, and say would the gentleman send the carriage in to our coachbuilder's to be repaired?

"I went to the address given and saw the gentleman. He was a handsome burly man of about forty, with a face bronzed all over as if he had lived abroad, clean-shaven, with black hair fast turning grey.

"He was very nice, and said 'All right'; and I was in the hall going away when a lady came out of one of the rooms and he said, 'This is the coachman who ran into us last night, my dear.' She said, 'Oh,' and looked at me, and I was out of the door and down the steps before you could say 'Jack Robinson.'

"*It was her again!*

"I thought it was another bigamy, and that she

was evidently in the wholesale line, until one day I met Mrs. Triggs accidentally, and she told me what happened.

"Mr. Harvey Jarvis had got completely under the thumb of his new lady housekeeper, and when he died had left her thirty thousand pounds in his will—why, nobody ever knew; but he did—and she stayed on at the house till all the furniture was sold off which was also left to her. And one day a gentleman called, and she told the servants it was her husband come back, who had been abroad for some years.

"And from one thing and the other I believe it was. He had managed to make things safe to come back again, and I suppose finding his wife had money wasn't in a hurry to go away again.

"But I often wonder if he knows how many times she was married while he was out of the country."

"Very wonderful!" I said, when Mr. Pluckrose had finished. "And I quite understand what Mr. Simley meant when he said your coincidence beat all we'd been talking about."

"Yes," said Mr. Pluckrose, "it was wonderful the way I always came upon that lady as my new mistress with a different husband, and I've got it so in my head that it's my fate that if I should get the sack to-morrow, and go into a new place, I should want long odds that I shouldn't find she'd been at it again, and managed to marry the gentleman who had engaged me as coachman."

XVIII.—A COACHMAN'S WINDFALL.

"LIFE is a strange mixture, and there are comedies and tragedies under our noses all day long." I don't think those are the exact words, but I read something very like them once in a book by a celebrated writer. I never expected to be mixed up with a tragedy myself, but, as the music-hall song says, "You never know your luck."

Nobody would have suspected one of our members of being a tragedy, though of course, as servants in families, some of us were bound to know many strange life-stories.

The one that I am about to relate was unsuspected by every member of the club, seeing that we had known what may be called the hero of it for years, and a more quiet, inoffensive, respectable man I never took a friendly glass with, which shows that we must never judge by appearances.

I daresay it will be thought wonderful that I should be mixed up personally in such a story, but no doubt many of my readers have shaken hands with a murderer and don't know it to this day.

Suppose you, my good lady, who are reading these lines, are a lodging-house keeper, letting furnished apartments. How do you know you have not chatted many a time with Jack the Ripper when

you took him up his rent-book? He must have lived somewhere, and met and talked with respectable people somewhere in London every day of his life. And they didn't know it then and don't know it now, because nobody can say who he was.

And so it was with the members of the Coachman's Club and myself with regard to Dick Dallaway.

Dick Dallaway was one of our regular members. There weren't many nights in the year that you wouldn't see Dick in his regular chair puffing away at his churchwarden and drinking his Irish hot with a bit o' lemon, after the good old fashion, with a glass crusher in the tumbler.

He never talked much about himself, and all we knew of him was that he was coachman to an old gentleman in London, who was a widower, as Dick was himself, and it was having no belongings, as the saying is, that made Dick look on the club as his home after the work was done, his governor never having the horses out of an evening if he could help it.

It was Dick's being so regular that made everybody ask what could have become of him when for a whole week his chair was empty. We thought he must be ill, or perhaps had gone out of town with his governor, and I asked if anybody knew where he lived, and I would go round and inquire, for we all liked Dallaway, and hoped there was nothing happened to him.

We turned to the book where the members' names and addresses were entered, which was one of our rules, and found that the address was a mews in Gower Street, so the next morning, having nothing particular to do, I went over, found the place, and rang the bell.

It was Dick himself who looked out of the upstairs window and said, "What is it?" so that was a bit of a relief, as he couldn't be very bad, being in his shirt sleeves.

When he saw it was me he came down and let me in.

"Come upstairs, Mr. Wynterdyke," he said. "Whoever would have thought of seeing you?"

"Well, Mr. Dallaway," I said, following him upstairs into his cosy little sitting-room, "the fact is, we'd begun to get uneasy about you at the club, not having seen you now for over a week, which is most unusual, and we were afraid you were ill, so I was deputed by the members to come over and see."

"It's very good of them," said Dick, "but it's nothing to do with myself that's kept me away, but my poor old governor, Mr. Gablin, is very ill, and I don't like to be out of the way, as twice this week they've sent for me in a hurry late at night to go off and get things for him that he wants. I'm afraid it's all up with the poor old chap by what the housekeeper, Mrs. Reany, tells me."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said. "You've been with him a long time, haven't you?"

"Twenty years."

"Why, that's almost a lifetime as you may say. I suppose if anything should happen to the old gentleman, such an old servant won't have to turn out into the world, so to speak?"

"No, Mr. Wynterdyke, I expect the governor's provided for me. But don't let's talk about that yet; time enough when it comes. Now I must go round to the house and see if anything's wanted."

"I'll walk with you if you like," I said; "I've got nothing to do for an hour or two."

Mr. Dallaway put on his coat and hat, and we went round to the house in Bedford Square, and I waited outside while Mr. Dallaway went in. He came out in about ten minutes and said, "He's worse. The doctor is there, and says he's sinking fast. You'll excuse me—I've got a lot of things to see to for Mrs. Reany."

We shook hands and parted, and that evening, when I went to the club, I explained why we hadn't seen anything of Dick Dallaway lately.

A week afterwards I was looking in the paper when accidentally in the "Births, Marriages, and Deaths" I saw the name of Mr. Gablin, of Bedford Square, aged seventy.

We didn't see Mr. Dallaway at the club again, so we supposed he'd come into some money, and some time afterwards Mr. Hutchins told us that he

had read in the papers, under the title of "A Coachman's Windfall," a statement that the late Mr. Gablin, a wealthy and eccentric old gentleman, who had died worth a lot of money, had left everything he had to his coachman, who had been with him many years, having no relatives living, and the property amounted to many thousands of pounds.

We all thought that was a jolly fine thing for our old fellow-member, and if we had known his address we should have sent him a telegram of congratulation.

I had forgotten about the matter, when one day, passing through Bedford Square, I looked up at the house, being in the neighbourhood bringing it to my mind, and whom should I see coming out of the front door but Dallaway himself, dressed up to the nines and quite the gentleman.

I went up to him and shook hands, and he said he supposed I'd heard, and would I come in and have a glass of port wine.

I went in and he took me into the dining-room. "I'm living here now with my wife," he said, "having taken the house on, the furniture and everything being left to me."

"Your wife!" I said. "You have married again, then?"

"Yes," he said, "I have married Mrs. Reany, the housekeeper, who was a widow."

Mrs. Dallaway came in while he was talking.

She was a handsome, middle-aged woman, but I didn't quite like the look of her, especially as I noticed she didn't seem very pleased to see a stranger there.

"It's all right, my dear," said Dallaway. "This is Mr. Wynterdyke, an old friend who knew me when I was in service."

She gave me a cold sort of a bow, as much as to say, "Don't come again, because you're not wanted." And I drank my glass of port and went.

"Can't carry her corn," I said to myself. "I don't envy Dallaway."

Going up Gower Street from Bedford Square, having to make a call near Regent's Park, I passed the mews where Dallaway had lived. Standing at the top was a groom I knew, and we passed the time of day and stopped for a chat.

One thing led to another, and he mentioned having Dallaway's old stables, the horses and carriages having been sold.

"Ah," I said, "what a romance—isn't it?—from being a coachman in this mews he has risen to be the governor in Bedford Square!"

"Yes," said the groom, "it is a romance as you call it, but folks about here can't make them Dallaways out at all. They live in that house, he and the housekeeper he's married since the old chap's death, but they live quite alone. There isn't a servant in the place. She and him do their own cleaning and dusting and sweeping and cooking,

not so much as a charwoman being allowed in the house, and they never go out together."

I said riches couldn't have done them much good if they had to keep a big house like that clean and tidy by their two selves, and do the cooking and everything.

"The queer part of it is," said the groom, "that the old chap left him such a pot of money they could afford to do the grand and live in first-class style. But except for an old mate or two that he asks in for a minute into the dining-room to have a drink, nobody ever crosses the threshold. You'd think there was something there 'as wasn't quite straight."

"Oh, that's nonsense," I said. "I suppose they don't want the bother of servants, not having been used to them; or, perhaps like other people that come into sudden wealth late in life, they're mean and hoard it up. I have heard of such things."

The groom shook his head. "It may be that," he said, "but it's got about that there's something wrong. One night the policeman on duty told me as he heard yells and screams inside the house like as if somebody was being murdered. It was all quiet after a minute or two, but he reported it to his inspector, and, acting on instructions, he said to Dallaway when he met him in the square, being on day duty, 'Was there anything the matter at your place the night before last? I thought I heard screaming.' Dallaway he turned as white as

writing paper for a minute, then he said, 'Oh, I remember. My wife had an attack of hysterics, having been frightened by a rat.'"

I said there was sure to be a lot of wicked gossip about a poor man who got suddenly rich, and very likely the neighbours in the square didn't like the idea of a coachman being their equal, and we shook hands and parted.

But that groom had put an idea into my head, and I remembered how mad Mrs. Dallaway looked to see me brought into the house, and I began to wonder if, after all, there was a skeleton in the cupboard between them, and I made up my mind whether there was or not I wouldn't call at Bedford Square again.

I didn't believe that there was anything wrong, but there *was*, and when it all came out it was a London sensation, and the papers were full of it, though I daresay it is forgotten now, as everything is sooner or later in these days when you can get a dozen tragedies a day for a halfpenny in your *Evening News* or *Star*, and the world's horrors are served up hot and fresh for you every morning with the newspaper on your breakfast table.

It was known that the old gentleman had left a large quantity of plate, and it got about through gossip that only Dallaway and his wife lived in the house, and one November night burglars got into the place, having climbed over the garden wall at the back. A policeman got an idea something was

wrong from what he noticed, and called another constable, and they got over too, and found the back window over the cistern on the second floor had been forced open. They climbed up and got into the house, and found a burglar at work in the dining-room. There was a scrimmage, and suddenly a shriek was heard from a room above. One constable held the burglar, and the other blew his whistle from the open window and then dashed upstairs.

Imagine his astonishment when he found Mr. Dallaway standing over a bed in a little room on the third floor on which was an old gentleman who was sitting up and wringing his hands and screaming and bellowing like a lunatic.

The constable was one who had been in that neighbourhood for some years, and he knew the old gentleman in a minute.

It was Mr. Gablin, who had been dead and buried for over a year.

Mr. Dallaway was ready to drop through the floor when he saw the policeman, and Mrs. Dallaway, who had heard the footsteps and come running in in her nightdress, went off in a dead faint.

By this time other policemen had come, hearing the whistle, and the sergeant, who saw he had got hold of a big mystery, sent off at once for the inspector.

When the burglar—there was only one—had been marched off to the station, the inspector asked

the old gentleman some questions, but could get nothing out of him, and saw he was mad. He didn't quite know on what charge to arrest Mr. and Mrs. Dallaway yet, but he said he would stay there till the morning, as the old gentleman being alive after they had buried him and taken possession of his property would have to be explained, as there was evidently some great fraud. They were to consider themselves prisoners. He kept two policemen in the house, and in the morning early he got a cab and took Mr. and Mrs. Dallaway to the station to explain to the superintendent the meaning of things, and he sent down to Scotland Yard to tell of his discovery, and the Home Secretary made an order for Mr. Gablin's coffin to be dug up.

When the coffin was opened there was a corpse in it, and the medical man who had given the certificate said that was the body of the old gentleman he had attended, but when he was shown Mr. Gablin he said he had never seen him in his life before.

The detectives pieced the whole mystery together at last by the aid of what the woman let out, thinking perhaps to make things better for herself.

It seems that the old gentleman, Mr. Gablin, had had a great regard for Dallaway, who had been with him for so many years, and had always promised to leave him enough for a competency when he died, if he stayed with him. Mr. Gablin had out-

lived his relatives and had no one to think of. But after the housekeeper, Mrs. Reany, came, the old gentleman began to have delusions and Dallaway was afraid he was going mad and would be put in an asylum, and he would be turned away, and perhaps the will be disputed.

So he made up to Mrs. Reany, finding out she was not too particular, and the two concocted a scheme. They got the old gentleman to put a codicil to his will, leaving Dallaway everything, and two of the servants signed it as witnesses, and soon after that Mrs. Reany discharged the servants, and had in two new ones, but they only came after there had been nobody but a charwoman in for nearly three weeks.

When the new servants came in they saw an old gentleman who was evidently very ill, and who sat by the fire all day and seemed very unhappy. These servants at the trial swore that this old gentleman was *not* the lunatic they had since been taken to see.

And it wasn't, for it came out what was the precious plot of those two villains. As Mr. Gablin had no friends and had never had a doctor in his life and no one to see him for years, it was not so hard as it might have been.

Dallaway had heard of a poor old man—a real gentleman—who had once been well off, but who was now in lodgings, and terribly troubled in his mind because he was dying of a slow disease, and

had nothing to leave to a little granddaughter who was quite dependent on him, and who he thought would starve.

Dallaway got hold of him, and told him that if he would consent to live at Bedford Square, and die there, and be called Mr. Gablin, he would give him one hundred pounds down to put in the bank for his grandchild, and sign an agreement with the person who had charge of her to pay her a thousand pounds on the death of Mr. Gablin, the money to be invested for the child's benefit.

The poor old fellow who was dying knew that Dallaway dare not break his word, and consented to be a party to the fraud for the sake of his granddaughter, who he feared would come to the workhouse. Mr. Gablin, who was weak-minded and odd, was got into a room by those two fiends and kept a prisoner there, and drugged to keep him quiet when the noisy fits were coming on him, and then the other old gentleman was brought in one night, and when the two servants came of course they took him for Mr. Gablin, their master.

When he got worse and the doctor was called in he was astonished he had had no doctor before, as the disease was far advanced. But Mrs. Reany said he had refused to see anyone, but at last, finding he was getting weak, she had sent for one.

It was a doctor from another district who had never seen the real Mr. Gablin, and of course never suspected the fraud, and when Mr. Gablin died, after

he had attended him nearly two months, of course he filled in the certificate all right, the death being a perfectly natural one from a disease of which there was no doubt.

Soon after the death the servants were discharged, and the secret of the prisoner in that little room, which was padded to keep out all sound and which was kept locked and the shutters fastened, was known to no one. Only now and then, when Mr. Gablin got a paroxysm, as I think it is called, they had a bother to stop his yells and screams.

Except for being mad, he was quite healthy, and had been well fed and well kept, as of course they wanted him to live as long as possible, as when it came to burying him they would have had a bother, but would very likely have dug him a grave deep down under the floor of the coal cellar, and nobody would ever have been the wiser.

It was about as artful and as diabolical a plot as any of the mysteries of London that I have ever heard of, but perhaps if they had had the villainy to add murder to their crimes and suffocate Mr. Gablin, after the other one had been buried as him, and put him away in quicklime under the coal cellar, which, having the house to themselves, they could easily have done, it would have succeeded, and the crime would have remained hidden for ever, as many are. How often do we read of excavations and pulling down old houses where skeletons are found under floors and bricked up in walls where

they have been perhaps for nearly a hundred years! I always think those are people who in their day "mysteriously disappeared" and were never heard of again.

Dallaway and the woman he had married as the price of her assistance in his plot did not have much enjoyment of their ill-gotten wealth, because they had to do all the housework themselves, and could never go away together, and must always have been on tenterhooks for fear of anybody finding out about their prisoner and so discovering the fraud.

And when it was discovered they got many years of penal servitude, but I heard afterwards that Dallaway died in prison.

Old Mr. Gablin, whose wealth had led to all the villainy—Dallaway being anxious to make sure of it—was put into a private lunatic asylum, and what became of the money when he died I don't know Under the will without the codicil a good deal of it was left to charities, so it is to be hoped they got it, as of course the codicil, having been made under the undue influence of Dallaway and the housekeeper, wouldn't stand.

I often wonder if there are any other cases of people having a grand funeral and being buried and their names put on a tombstone while they are alive, and if there are not some more coffins which might be opened and found to contain the wrong corpse.

Perhaps there are, but I don't want to be mixed up with any more. One case of that kind was enough for me, and I have never quite believed in anybody being a humdrum, quiet, respectable person just because they looked it, after the terrible way I and, for the matter of that, all the members of the Coachman's Club were deceived about Dick Dallaway.

XIX.—THE FAIRY COACHMAN.

HE was a funny old chap was Chris Kirkus, and one of the good old-fashioned sort, and what is called a character.

When I first joined our club he had retired from service for a year or two, and had a little job and fly yard which he had been put into by a gentleman to manage, he taking a share of the profits and a salary, and was doing very well, but having been a member of this club for so many years he was allowed to remain by a special rule which we had, though of course strictly our club was only for gentlemen actually engaged in private service.

I think he rather looked down on some of the smarter chaps, and he was always saying he couldn't abide the new-fangled ways, but the things that made him maddest to talk about were bicycles, and especially bicycles with ladies on them. Perhaps it was cycling having just begun to hurt the job and livery yard business that made him extra savage, but it was quite refreshing to hear Mr. Kirkus on the subject of bicycles in the traffic. They told me at the club that till the bicycles came in the things that used to make him wildest to talk about were the tramway lines,

which, in his own language, "he couldn't abide the sight of."

He was one of those fine old fellows who would like things to stop just as they were when they were young men, and can't bring themselves to believe that anything that is a new idea can possibly be any good.

I shall never forget one night that a young coachman who had been invited into the club lighted a cigarette. Old Chris Kirkus's eyes nearly started out of his head, and his fine old face went as red as a beetroot with indignation. I thought he would have had an apoplectic fit there and then. He managed to splutter out a good old-fashioned expression of astonishment, and then those sitting near him quieted him down, as, of course, the young fellow who was smoking a cigarette was a guest, and we rather prided ourselves on our gentlemanly manners and behaving in our club as our masters would behave in theirs.

But after the young fellow had gone Chris Kirkus let his language have its head, and chucked the reins on its back, so to speak. He wanted to know what the country was coming to when a hearty young fellow calling himself an English coachman could stick one of them foreign paper things in his mouth, and fancy he was smoking. He said it was a beastly foreign habit that had been brought over here by the Italian ice-cream barrow-men and such like, and he supposed we should have English

coachmen twisting out their moustaches into spikes next, and cutting their hair down to the roots with the clipping machine, and eating snails and frogs and macaroni instead of honest English beef and potatoes.

But with all his hatred of new inventions, new ideas, and new manners and customs, he was a fine, generous-hearted, jovial, wholesome Englishman was Chris, and always the first to put his hand in his pocket when there was a comrade to be helped through a time of trouble or sickness, and when you got him by himself and nothing was irritating him you couldn't want to spend an hour in better or more amusing company.

One evening that we were talking quietly together at the club there was nobody else in the room but old Tom Kellaway, who is coachman to an elderly invalid lady. He was quite deaf, and didn't hear anything unless he was shouted at, and then only on one side, so he didn't matter. It was dreadful after shouting at him fit to make you hoarse for a week to hear him say quite quietly "Would you mind speaking into my other ear? I *can* hear a little with that." He always had to keep that ear to the pavement to take his orders when out, and would turn his horses round so as to take instructions without the old lady's companion having to go and stand in the muddy road to speak to him.

There being only myself, old Tom Kellaway,

and Mr. Kirkus in the room, it being early, I and Mr. Kirkus dropped into conversation together, promiscuous like at first, but presently about our experiences in service, and after talking over a lot of things Mr. Kirkus looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, and said:

"You wouldn't think I'd ever been a fairy story to look at me, would you now, Mr. Wynterdyke?"

I wondered what he was driving at, and I laughed. "Fairy story or no fairy story," I said, "I'm sure if it happened to you it's worth telling."

He didn't take any notice of that, but asked me another question. "Did you ever hear of a fairy story called 'Cinderella'?"

"Why, of course I have," I said; "I read it when I was a little bit of a nipper. It's all about two spiteful sisters and a poor little girl and a glass slipper, and I've seen it as a pantomime at Drury Lane. Herbert Campbell was one of the spiteful sisters, and made me laugh till my sides ached."

"I daresay, but I don't go to pantomimes—they ain't what they used to be when I was a boy. But if you remember 'Cinderella,' you remember there was a coachman in the story."

"A coachman?" I said, "Where?"

"Why, the one that drove Cinderella to the ball in a coach. The fairy godmother turned a pumpkin into the carriage and the coachman she made

out of a rat or a white mouse, or something of that sort."

"Oh! of course," I said, "I remember that."

"Well, I was that sort of a coachman once," said Mr. Kirkus, as grave as a judge. "I don't mean, of course, that I was turned into one from being a white mouse, but I was a fairy-story coachman for all that."

I was sitting by the fire at the time, leaning forward holding the poker in between the bars, stirring the coals, and letting go of it it fell out on the iron fender, making a fearful crash.

Mr. Kellaway, who was sitting back with his eyes closed, looked up and said, "I beg your pardon—were you speaking to me?"

I shook my head, and both me and Mr. Kirkus laughed, and as soon as I'd picked the poker up and put it in its place, I said, "I should like to hear about your being a fairy coachman very much, if you don't mind telling me."

"Not at all," said Mr. Kirkus, and then he began to tell me, and as near as I can remember it I have written it down here in his own words.

"Ever so many years ago," said Mr. Kirkus, "when things were very different to what they are now, and the world was worth living in and people were happy in their homes and didn't want to be out all day, eating kickshaws at foreign restyrongs with names over the front door that were never made for honest English tongues to

speak, I was living as coachman with Sir Simon Leigh, a peppery, yellow-faced old gentleman who had made a fortune in the East Indies and come back to England in his old age to spend it in as much peace and quietness as his liver and the gout would let him. He was as rich as Creases, as the saying is, but he was a bachelor and so his money wasn't much good to him.

"I got on with him all right because I didn't mind his language, but a more irritable, cantankerous old gentleman I never met in my life. He seemed always to be in a rage with himself and everybody else, and I have seen him dance on his own hat in a passion and sweep the breakfast china off the table with his walking-stick when his foot was bandaged up and he was irritated by the gout.

"He hadn't any friends, because he quarrelled with everybody sooner or later, and he spent most of his time at his club, where he was a perfect terror to the servants; and I've heard that it was always a relief to everybcdy when it was eleven o'clock, and I drove up with the carriage to take him home.

"The only relatives he had were his brother, who was married and had two daughters, and this brother, Mr. Robert Leigh, and Sir Simon had been bad friends for twenty years; in fact, ever since Mr. Robert married. The reason of it was that the younger brother had married the

young lady that Sir Simon would have liked to marry himself. In fact, he had come back from India on purpose to do so, having just been knighted for some great public service, and was anxious to make pretty Miss Muriel Ferguson, who was a kind of distant cousin, Lady Leigh.

"I've heard say it was that as soured him, and coming on top of the Indian climate made him unbearable. After the marriage he never wrote or spoke to his brother, who I was told had several times tried to make friends, but had always been insulted. The only communication Sir Simon ever made to him was one day when they met in the street, when he told his brother that not one shilling of his would he ever get, for he'd left his entire fortune to societies and institutions in England and India.

"Mr. Robert took it very quietly, saying he had all he wanted and was very happy, and as his brother wouldn't give him his affection he could keep his money. He could afford to be independent in those days, for he was in a shipping-house himself, and was very comfortably off.

"But when I went into Sir Simon's service Mr. Robert had been ruined by the failure of the house he was connected with, and everything had been swept away. I heard of it through Potts, Sir Simon's man, who had been with him for many years and had known the family from a boy, being the son of an old servant of Sir Simon's

father, and Potts used to say to me what a terrible thing it was that Sir Simon was so hard hearted, and with all his wealth which he didn't enjoy a bit, didn't stir hand or foot to help poor Mr. and Mrs. Leigh and the two young ladies, who were living in apartments in a shabby street, and must be in terrible straits if all that he had heard was true.

"I said to Potts that if I was with him I should find out, and perhaps he might be able to say a word for them to the governor when he was in a good humour, if such a thing ever happened. He said he would, and a day or two afterwards while I was waiting in the library for Sir Simon to send for me, Potts came in, and told me that he had found out all about Mr. and Mrs. Robert Leigh, and it was a most pitiful tale. The family were really almost without means, and the two young ladies, both beautiful and amiable, would have to go out and earn their living, as their mother was ill, and their father quite broken down.

"He told the story so well that it quite brought the tears to my eyes, and I said it was disgraceful, and Sir Simon ought to be ashamed of himself, and suddenly I heard a stick come down on the floor and we both turned round, and there was Sir Simon, his eyes starting out of his head. He had heard all we had said about his relatives, and he was like a madman with rage, and his language was enough to make a respectable man

put cotton-wool in his ears for the rest of his life.

"I thought we should both get the sack, but we didn't. Sir Simon ordered me at twelve, and I went out as quick as I could.

"When I went round at twelve the governor told me 'The Bank,' and I drove there. He went in, and when he came out he drove to a house agent and a clerk came with him and got into the carriage, and I drove them to Hampstead to an address given me. It was a beautiful house with 'To let furnished, with immediate possession' on the board. They went in and were there about half an hour, and when they came out the governor said 'Home,' and I drove back.

"That afternoon I had to go round again to see if there were any fresh orders, and the valet, Mr. Potts, was just coming out. 'He's cracked!' he said to me. 'I've got to go and engage servants and put them in a house at Hampstead, and get no end of things for it, and the governor's orders are to spare no expense, but to have everything ready to receive some friends of his who are coming to take possession of it.'

"He went off, and I went into the library. There was nobody there, but on the table was a letter the governor had been writing and hadn't finished. I couldn't help reading it as it lay there.

"It was to his brother, saying that he enclosed him five hundred pounds, and with that he was to

buy everything he and his wife and the young ladies wanted, and that they were to be dressed and ready at seven o'clock the next evening. At seven o'clock they would be called for.

"I heard Sir Simon coming, and I moved away from the table. He gave a little grunt when he saw me and sat down, and I saw him take a bundle of bank-notes out of his pocket and put them in the letter. Then he put the lot into a big envelope and directed it, and said, 'You are to go with this at once. Ask for Mr. Robert Leigh or one of the Miss Leighs, if he is not in. Give it into their hands and come away. It is money, so don't lose it. You understand.'

"'Yes, sir,' I said.

"At that moment the maid-servant came to say that Mr. Jones, the horse-dealer, had called.

"'Ah,' said the governor to me. 'I'd forgotten. Come outside and tell me what you think of this pair."

"I went outside with him, and there was Jones, with a spanking pair of dark bays in a phaeton. He drove them up and down, and then I got up and drove them, and I told Sir Simon I thought they were a first-class pair.

"'All right, Jones,' said Sir Simon. 'I've bought a carriage at Laurie and Marner's, and the new harness has been sent on there. Be there with the horses at five, and my man will be there to meet you and drive them home.'

"I wondered what we wanted with a new carriage and a pair like that, but of course I said nothing.

"'Now go with that letter,' said Sir Simon, 'and make haste back.'

"I found the address—it *was* a shabby street—and I asked a dirty little maid-of-all-work for Mr. Robert Leigh. The poor gentleman came down looking very pale and worried. I gave him the letter and didn't wait for him to open it, but touched my hat and was round the corner in no time.

"When I got back Sir Simon said, 'You must be at the coachbuilder's at five for the new carriage and horses. You can put them up in our stables till to-morrow; there's room, isn't there?'

"I said, 'Yes, there was,' and at five I brought the grand new lot home.

"The next day Sir Simon was half over London in the brougham going to all manner of shops and places.

"When we got back he said, 'Oh, I've engaged a young fellow as carriage groom; you'll find him round at the stables I expect. He's got his livery, and you're to put the new horses in the carriage and be round here at a quarter to seven, and he is to be on the box with you.'

"I said 'Very good, sir.' And when I got to the stables there was the young fellow. At a quarter to seven we were round at the house with

the new lot. Sir Simon came out and gave the groom a note, and said, 'When you get to the place you are going to, you are to hand that note in and wait.'

"Then he said to me, 'Kirkus, you are no longer my coachman. You are engaged from to-night by my brother, Mr. Robert Leigh, whose horses you are now driving. You will wait at his house for the family, who will think they are coming to me. Instead of that you will drive them to that house at Hampstead we went to look at the other day. I shall be there waiting for you—I am going on now in a cab.'

"You might have knocked me off the box. It seemed like a madman's idea the whole thing, for I had begun to understand what it meant now. But I wasn't going to argue with Sir Simon—I knew better than that. So I touched my hat and said, 'Yes, sir,' and drove off to do as I had been ordered.

"When we got to the house the groom got down and knocked and gave in his note, and in about ten minutes Mr. Robert Leigh came out, with his wife, who was evidently ill, leaning on his arm, and got into the carriage, and after him came two of the sweetest young ladies I had even seen in my life. They got into the carriage, evidently having been told what to do in the note, and the groom touched his hat, shut the door, and got up by me.

"Then I drove to Hampstead, which was what I had been told to do.

"When we drove up the carriage drive the front door was open, and there was Sir Simon waiting in the hall to receive us.

"He helped his sister-in-law out, and shook hands with his brother and the two young ladies, who seemed quite bewildered, and then he said, 'Welcome to your new home,' and they were evidently so thunderstruck that they did not know what to say, for they went in as though they were in a dream.

"'You'll find the stables on the right, Kirkus,' Sir Simon said to me, 'and your rooms and the groom's are all ready. I think you will find everything in order and ready for you. I shall give Mr. Leigh an excellent character with you, and I hope you will prove as good a servant to him as you have been to me.' With that he slipped a five-pound note into my hand, and I drove round to the stables expecting to find myself dropping off the box in a nightmare, and waking up to find I was on my back in bed.

"But it was no dream. The stables were there with everything as right as a trivet. Corn and everything was in, and a charwoman waiting to tell me all about my rooms and the groom's, and did I want anything cooked as the fire was alight and she had got in some provisions.

"Me and the groom set to with the horses and

the carriage, and before we were through up come three four-wheel cabs. One had my luggage on it, and the other two had all the luggage and belongings of Mr. Leigh, which Sir Simon had fetched from the apartments in the shabby street.

"That night, when I sat in my little room over the stables, and smoked my pipe, I said to myself, 'Chris Kirkus, you've been playing the fairy coachman to a family of Cinderellas, and old Sir Simon has been playing the fairy godfather!'"

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Chris Kirkus paused for breath, and as soon as I could get mine I said, "Well, it *is* more like a fairy tale than real life. What did the family think of it?"

"Well," he said, "of course I didn't hear them say anything, only I know that when they got inside they found a lovely house with fires lighted and dinner ready, and servants all waiting as if they'd been there for years, and a maid for the young ladies; and one of the maids told me that Sir Simon told his relatives that everything was theirs, and that all he had belonged to them, as they'd have it after he was dead, and he had thousands a year more than he knew what to do with, and they were his only kith and kin.

"And it must have been a wonderful family party that evening, with wealth and happiness suddenly come again to these poor people, and the brothers reunited after twenty years of separation.

"I stayed with them for five years, and Sir Simon was a constant visitor and always welcome, and it quite changed him to find himself loved and able to make others happy.

"His valet, Mr. Potts, told me afterwards that that day Sir Simon had heard us talking, after I had gone the governor had made him tell him all he knew about his brother, and when he had heard it he said out loud: 'Potts, I've been a dashed villain!' and his heart was moved, and from that moment he determined to atone to his brother for his past cruelty.

"I never had a word awry with Mr. Robert or the young ladies, or Mrs. Leigh, and I'd have gone through fire and water for them, but after they'd lived there five years one of the young ladies, Miss Muriel, the eldest, got married, and went to live with her husband in the country, and Sir Simon he bought an estate near them and the whole family moved there. Sir Simon, who was getting rather weak and infirm, lived with them, and, as I heard afterwards, died with them, his deathbed being made happy by the love and tender care of his own flesh and blood, and all his wealth he left to his brother and his family.

"I left them when they went into the country because I wanted to stop in town, and they gave me the best of characters and a handsome present when I went to a new place.

"And that," said Mr. Kirkus, "is the story of how

I was once a fairy coachman—just as much as if I had been turned into one from a rat and driven a carriage that had been a pumpkin till the fairy godmother waved her hand over it, and told Miss Cinderella to get into it, and look upon it as her own property."

"Yes," I said; "but if I had got that idea into my head as you did at the time, I should have begun to feel a bit uneasy when the clock struck twelve."

XX.—THE PRETTY PARLOURMAID.

Of course it was the most ridiculous thing in the world, and there was nothing in it. But it upset me terribly. My good little wife was jealous.

I can't laugh it at even now, because for a time it came between us like a black shadow, and we seemed to be drifting away from each other—and it was all so silly.

I didn't know it at first. I thought my little woman was fretting because she was out of health, and the doctor always in the place.

I thought she was cold and irritable and answered me snappishly, and sometimes when I came home I could see she had been crying, but I didn't say much, because if I did she got hysterical, and I never could stand a woman in hysterics. It sets every nerve in my body jumping, and though I am not, I hope, a hard-hearted man, it always makes me want to swear. But, of course, we men don't understand these things, being built of different stuff, and we never shall.

But one evening it all came out—came out with tears and sobs and upbraidings—and my poor little

girl worked herself up, never giving me a chance of getting a word in, and when she couldn't think of anything else to call me suddenly sat down with a gasp, and said she hoped as my blood ran in their veins I'd be kind to the children, and not turn them out of house and home for the sake of a good-for-nothing, fluffy-haired minx, and she hoped I should be happy, and I mustn't trouble to go and identify her body when, having drowned herself in the Regent's Canal, she was taken to the mortuary.

And it was all brought out by my saying I was going to the club.

When the missus first began I only stared at her, but as she went on my face began to flush, and I went crimson to the roots of my hair, as the saying is. I was so indignant I couldn't do anything but gasp and clench my hands. Feeling that I was going hot and looking guilty made me tremble with rage, and of course, woman-like, the missis took the way she'd flabbergasted me as proof positive she was a poor ill-used woman, and I was a wretch who had basely deceived her.

But when she'd quite finished and was sitting panting and moaning, and rocking herself to and fro in the nursing chair, I made a desperate effort to pull myself together, and banging the table with my fist, I exclaimed:

"Woman, what in the name of Heaven do you mean?"

She was up in a moment, glaring at me. "Don't deny it!" she screamed. "You know very well what I mean. Look at your guilty face!"

"Guilty face be hanged!" I shouted. "Come—out with it—who's been putting this nonsense into your head?"

At first she said nobody—it was all her own knowledge, but at last I managed to get at the truth. In our mews there was a coachman's wife who ought to have been ducked in a horse-pond, and stood in the stocks, and hooted out of the place for an evil-tongued, mischief-making, scandal-mongering catamaran, and this woman, Mrs. Roots, had poisoned my wife's mind against me, and made out that I was carrying on a flirtation with a tall and stylish young parlour-maid, Jane Parsons, who was in Sir Walter—my Governor's—service.

This confounded Mrs. Roots had most unluckily seen me walking with Jane and another young lady in Oxford Street late one evening, but it was quite an accident. They had been to the Princess's Theatre, having an evening out, and we met quite accidentally, and it being late and the 'buses full, I walked with them as far as the house, it being on my way.

And I will confess, because I don't want to make things better than they are, that Jane was in the habit of passing the time of day to me when I went round to the house, and perhaps there may

have been a few words of harmless chaff between us, but as to the girl ever having seriously entered my head, she was no more to me than a milestone on the Dover Road.

It seems Mrs. Roots, having seen us together in Oxford Street, being on the other side of the way, had got friendly with one of the housemaids at Sir Walter's, and this girl—I won't demean myself by saying she was jealous—had made the most of our bit of harmless chaff to Mrs. Roots, and Mrs. Roots had gone full of it to my wife and poisoned her mind against me.

When I'd got it all out of the missus, I said to her, "And you believe this?"

"I do," she said. "You don't deny it."

"What is there to deny?" I said. "I did walk home with Jane and her friend, and when I am round at the house and I see her I speak to her as any Christian man might speak to a Christian woman, but as to your being jealous and talking about her as a fluffy-haired minx, and saying you'll drown yourself, it's—it's—it's dam silly!"

"That's right," said my wife with a glare I had never seen in her eyes before. "Swear at me. I suppose by and by you'll be knocking me about. But I won't give you the chance, John Wynterdyke, I'll have a separation, and live in a garret on what the law compels you to give me out of your wages. Oh, I knew what would come of your precious club!"

"What's the club got to do with it?" I said.

"What's the club got to do with it?" she screamed. "It's got everything to do with it. It's a paltry excuse for married men to be out half the night gadding about with hussies. Mrs. Roots warned me long ago what that club meant."

"Dash Mrs. Roots!" I said. "If I had her here I'd wring her neck!"

"Yes, you say that because you know she isn't here. Mr. Roots is away with his people at Torquay, and she's with him."

That was true, and the thought of my own powerlessness to face the slanderess maddened me. "Once more," I said," do you believe this infamous charge?"

"I do," said my wife, "and for two pins I'd go round to the house now and tell that hussy what I think of her."

That sent a cold shiver down my back. It was an awful position for an innocent man to be placed in. What can you do under such circumstances but look an utter fool? I had visions of my little wife, who is five foot nothing, glaring up and shrieking at Jane Parsons, who is five foot ten, and trying to tear her cap off or something equally idiotic, and the idea of it made me go burning red again.

"Ah! you're afraid I shall," said my wife, her chest heaving and her eyes coming half out of her head. "It's of that minx you're thinking now,

and not of me, your lawful wife. Oh! you bad, vile man—go away! I hate you—I hate you!—I hate you!"

She stamped her little foot, and really for a minute by the way she clawed with her hands at the air, I thought she was going to scratch my face. I picked up my hat, with a strong expression, and rushed out of the house and round and round the square, jabbering to myself and raging till I wonder the policeman didn't stop me and take me away to the nearest lunatic asylum, and when a miserable old woman came up to beg a copper for a night's lodging I thought of Mrs. Roots, and told her to go to a place where she would find a warm lodging for nothing.

I was terribly upset—I really wasn't responsible for what I said or did. I felt like a man that is bound with ropes and is straining every muscle to burst them, and the more he strains the sharper they cut into his flesh.

Perhaps I ought not to have walked home with Jane Parsons and her female friend. But, good heavens above! was a man because he was married never to speak to another woman again as long as he lived? Perhaps I oughtn't to have answered her at the governor's house when she said, "Good morning, Mr. Wynterdyke. How's your wife?" Perhaps I ought to have asked her how she dared to wish a married man good morning, and stop

and have a minute's friendly chat with him. A pretty fool I should have looked if I had. Of course such an idea was absurd.

The worst of it was that Jane Parsons—and I own up to it—was a decidedly pleasing young woman, with lovely hair—it *wasn't* fluffy—and a pair of sparkling eyes that cheered you up to look at them, and she had a most beautiful complexion, being a Devonshire girl, and a Devonshire complexion isn't to be beaten in the whole wide world, not even in the men, as I know, having once spent a month in Plymouth when I was a young man.

But, good gracious me, if Jane Parsons hadn't been pretty, being a fellow-servant, so to speak, I should have been civil to her. But I suppose if she had been old and ugly, it wouldn't have appeared the same thing to my wife when Mrs. Roots told her all about it and made a mountain of mischief out of a molehill of innocent politeness from one fellow-servant to another.

After I had calmed down a bit I made up my mind that I would give Sir Walter notice in the morning, and go away and take a place in the country where we should be miles away from Jane Parsons.

And a pretty pass things had come to that through a wretched, mischief-making woman, I should have to give up a first-class situation and

wander about the world with an unhappy wife and a family growing up.

And after all it might not be any use. Women when they are jealous will imagine anything, and my wife would very likely declare for the rest of her days that I had buried her alive in the country because I was afraid she would get at Jane Parsons and do her an injury.

Suddenly I had an idea. I thought I would go to the club and try and forget my misery there. It was idiotic to keep on wandering round and round the square talking out loud to nobody and getting into a perspiration exposed to the night air. So I turned off sharp at the first corner and made my way to the place where I knew I should find somebody to talk to.

There were plenty of members there, and I was soon in the thick of the conversation. But I learnt afterwards that a good many of them thought I had had a glass too much, for I talked at random and shouted, and being generally a quiet man, they noticed it and put my excitement down to the most usual cause among our members, which was only natural under the circumstances.

I stayed there till almost shutting-up time, and should have stayed to the last, but Steve Waylett, an old friend of mine, got up to go, and said, "Coming my way, John?" and so I said, "Yes, Steve," and we walked home together, his stable being within a stone's throw of our mews.

When we got outside Steve put his arm in mine and said, "What's the matter with you, John? There's something wrong with you to-night!" and Steve being a married man himself and an old friend, and his wife knowing mine, I told him all about it.

"Ah," he said, when I'd finished, "that's a bad job. It's easy to get jealousy into a woman's heart, but it's a hard matter to get it out again. What are you going to do?"

"God knows!" I said. "If I was guilty I'd own up and ask her to forgive me, but I'm as innocent as an unborn babe, and that's what makes it so deuced hard."

"Not so hard as you think, John. After all, it shows how she loves you. Where there's no love there's no jealousy."

"That's true, Steve," I said, "but suppose she goes round to the house and pulls Jane Parsons' hair out?"

"Oh, pickles! Women talk about that sort of thing, but they don't do it—not decent women—they've too much respect for themselves; and your wife, John, is a little queen, and a wife a king might be proud of."

"You're right there, Steve, and God bless you for saying it," I said, grasping his hand, for he was always a true pal was Steve, and an honour to his profession.

"Well, seeing it's her love for you that's at the

bottom of it all, and that there's lots of men who'd give a good deal to be loved so well that their wives couldn't bear the thought of another woman ever being in their company for half an hour, or having a friendly chaff with them, don't you think that to-night when you get home you'd better say right out that perhaps you *oughtn't* to have walked home with Jane Parsons, and perhaps you *oughtn't* to have let her chatter to you at the house?"

"But, good gracious, what harm was there in it?"

"None, from your point of view—a good deal from your wife's. Look here, John, you've known me a good many years, and you know I've seen a good bit of life."

"Yes, we all know that, and we all know you're a bit of what's called a philosopher."

"I'm nothing with such a long name as that, John, but I'm a man as has kept his eyes open and takes a common sense view of things. Now I'll put your case the other way. Suppose your wife had been in a shop and you'd been at home looking after the children. Suppose of a night after she came back and you wanted her to sit and talk to you, she put on her bonnet and went off to her club three or four evenings a week. Suppose somebody came to you and told you that when she came out of the club of an evening, she was seen walking home with a handsome young fellow

who—well, who'd lost his 'bus—and suppose this handsome young fellow was an assistant in the same shop where she worked, and you found out they were always chaffing each other there. Now I put it to you, John, would you or would you not be jealous?"

Steve Waylett stopped dead under a lamp post and stuck his hands in his pockets and waited for my answer.

I tried to think round the situation and find a way out of it, but the more I pictured to myself my little wife and that young fellow doing exactly and in all innocence as I and Jane Parsons had done, the more I saw how absolutely right he was, and so I out with it straight and said "Yes—I should be jealous and it's no good my saying I shouldn't."

"Then, John, the best thing you can do is to leave off looking at yourself as an injured martyr, and to go straight away home, ask the missus to forgive you in a nice pretty way, and promise to be a good boy for the future, and keep Jane Parsons at a respectful distance from another woman's property."

"But, good Lord, Steve," I said, "that's as much as confessing that I've carried on with the girl. The wife will think all manner of things."

"Oh, no, she won't. You don't suppose for one moment she thinks you're any worse than you are. Only she knows that you're a handsome

fellow, John, and she's a good deal more afraid that Jane Parsons will fall in love with you than she is that you will fall in love with Jane Parsons."

It flattered me a bit—I'm only human—Steve saying that I was handsome and that the girls were likely to fall in love with me, because I suppose there's not a man living, married or single, that wouldn't sooner be liked by the ladies than not, but it was only just a passing thought. I saw at the same time that Steve was right and that his advice was good, and so I shook his hand heartily and told him I would do exactly what he told me, and he'd been a true friend to me.

He gave me a kind pat on the back and said, "Off you go, then, and bring the missus round to my place to-morrow to tea, and my wife will make her welcome. A woman wants a woman to talk to, you know, when she's been through a trouble of this sort, however happily it may have ended."

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It was one o'clock in the morning before I got back, and the missus had gone to bed and cried herself to sleep.

I looked at her poor little face, pale and pinched, as it lay on the pillow, with the eyelids swollen and red, and a great lump came up in my throat.

"Good God!" I said to myself, "what have I

done that this trouble should come between us, through a wretched, back-biting, evil-minded hag!"

My wife woke up and opened her eyes and gave a deep sigh. I flung myself down on my knees by the bedside and lifted her head till it lay against my breast, and I said: "Jenny, I can't bear it. Since the day I first knew I loved you no other woman has ever been in my heart or in my thoughts for a single second. It is terrible that you and I should be bad friends, that you should think evil of me, and break your poor little heart when there isn't the slightest reason in the world for it. I swear to you here on my knees, by all that is sacred that there isn't."

She lifted up her arms with a great sob, and put them round my neck and said, "I do believe you, dear. I've been a foolish, wicked woman—but oh, I was so unhappy! Forgive me, dear—forgive me!"

I pressed my lips to hers, and the big tears rolled down my cheeks and we both had a good cry together in each other's arms. And I'm not ashamed of it, though perhaps some people who've never known what the love of man and wife is may think it weak and unmanly.

And that night when I lay down by my old darling's side and watched her fall into a gentle sleep with a smile on her loving face,

I even forgave Mrs Roots!

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I am still a member of the Coachman's Club, but I don't go there nearly so often as I used to do. Now and then I drop in when the wife is spending an evening with some friends, but the happiest evenings I know are those that I spend with her and the children, and when the children are asleep and dreaming their happy dreams, and the fit comes upon me to leave my home for a while I generally ask the missus if she would like to go with me.

She looks up at me with a smile and says, "I should like it very much, but you are *quite* sure you wouldn't rather go to your club?"

And the answer that I give her is strictly private.

THE END.
